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Making Festive Magic

Designer Jae Won Lee reveals how he imbued the Holiday Express Train with the spirit of the season

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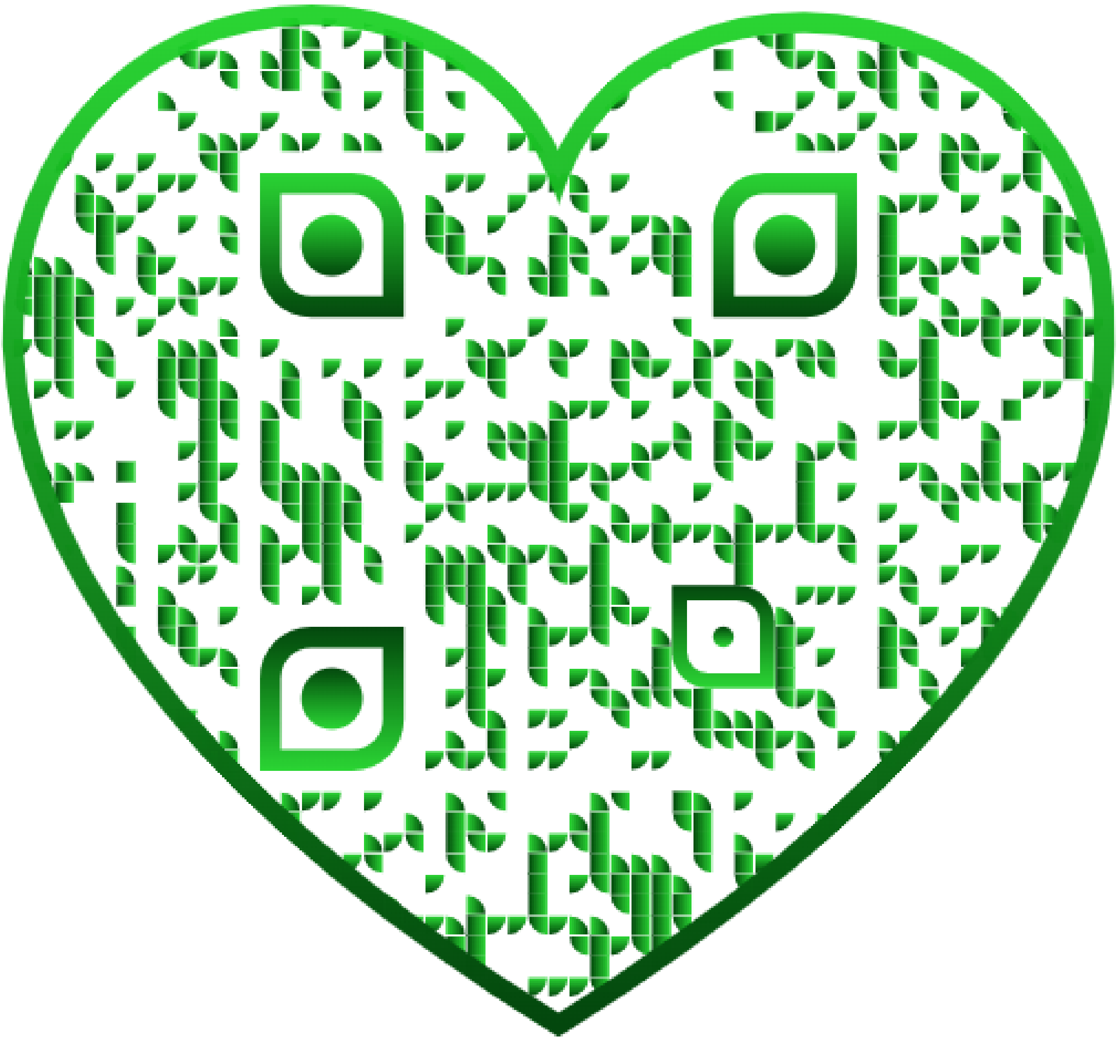

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THIS MONTH

One of my cherished memories is when I unwrapped a massive present on Christmas day that turned out to be 6769 Fort Legoredo from LEGO Western. I was absolutely thrilled.

Later that day I had the box open and was putting it together. It was one of those occasions when I sensed that my parents wished it had taken me a little longer to build it, but they needn't have worried – the hours and hours of play that I got from that set cannot be overstated. There are so many wonderful story starters in the sizable model and it remains one of my most treasured sets.

I am sure that most of you can identify things in your own collection that are special gifts from Christmas time, whether they are from adulthood or well-worn builds from childhood. So many memories that involve LEGO bricks take place around the holidays that you can't help but associate the festivities with the hobby.

That's exactly why we're hearing from the designers behind this year's two big Christmas sets in this issue of Blocks. Model Designer Jae Won Lee reveals how he connected 10361 Holiday Express Train to a previous Winter Village set, then Design Manager Samuel Liltorp Johnson and Senior Product Manager Vincente Kenrice Klehr explain how they had yuletide gatherings in mind when they crafted the enormous 41843 Family Christmas Tree Decoration.

If you're the 'bah humbug' type, then you can flick through to Build & Chat for a Christmas free discussion in which Model Designer Chi Wing Lee talks all things NINJAGO. For a peek into a future brick professional's mind, have a read of Will Tachick's account of what it was like to be a competitor on the first ever LEGO Masters Jr.

There is plenty of inspiration to discover too, including a jaw-dropping model based on Japan's Edo period. Find out how Rogue Bricks collaborated internationally on this masterpiece, then get some tips to incorporate into your own creations.

Or if you want a more solid starting point, check out the different instructions we're providing for small models – you can craft a miniature Game Boy, put together a modern take on 9440 Venomari Shrine or a tiny depiction of the Holiday Express.

I suppose that brings us back to Christmas again... 'tis the season after all! Don't forget to have your LEGO advent calendar ready.

Leg godt!

Graham

GRAHAM E. HANCOCK
Editor
graham@blocksmag.com

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What we've been building...

At Bricks Cascade in Portland, Oregon, Matt displayed something rather epic and rather special... a complete collection of Space sets released between 1978 and 1990.

Nelson and Daniel tackled 77073 Battle Bus, the iconic Fortnite vehicle that kicks off every battle. Check out future editions of Blocks magazine to see what they have planned for it...

If you caught LEGO Masters Jr. then you saw Will take on the ultimate brick-building challenge and make it to the final. You can read all about his experience from page 46.

Graham built his score when he had the opportunity to play through a preview section of LEGO Batman: Legacy of the Dark Knight, which focused on detecting crimes in progress.

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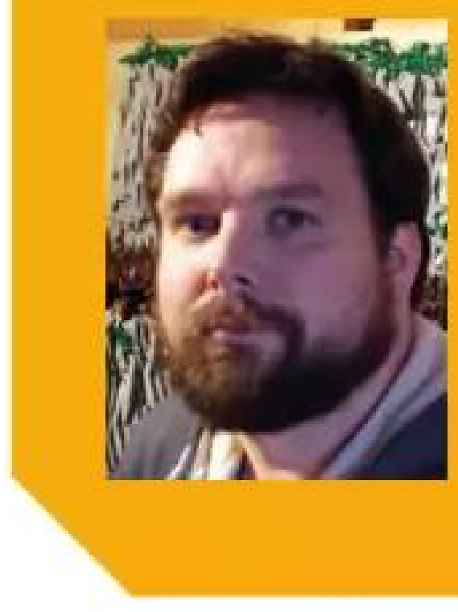
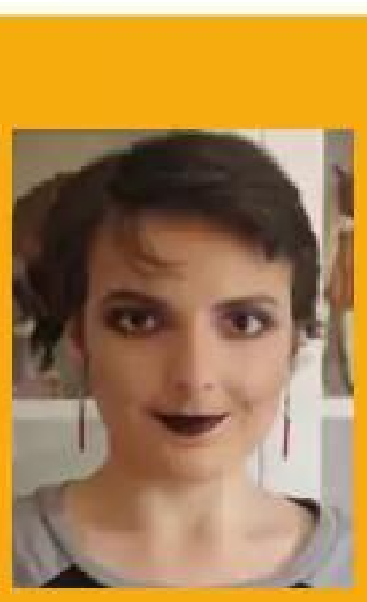
Editor
GRAHAM E. HANCOCK
A LEGO expert who can't remember life without the brick, Graham loves using that knowledge to bring Blocks to readers every single month.

Build Expert & Historian
DANIEL KONSTANSKI
Both a builder and a collector, Daniel has extensively researched the LEGO Group's history, making him an unrivalled fount of knowledge.


Build Specialist
SIMON PICKARD
If there's a way to put two bricks together, Simon knows it. He's an experienced builder who is always discovering new techniques.

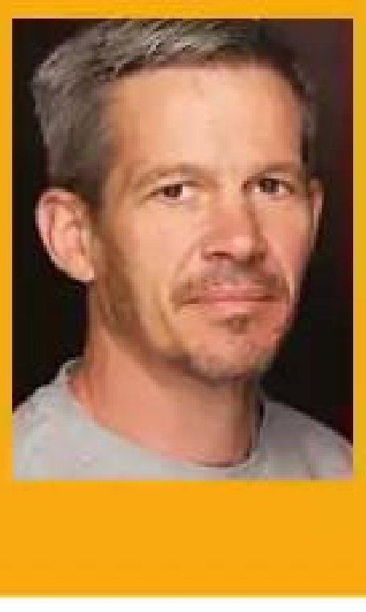

Features Writer
KAT REES-JAUKE
This life-long brick fan is always ready to dig deep into the latest sets to find out how they were conceptualised, designed and developed.

Features Writer
ANTHONY WALKER-COOK
With a passion for fantasy sets but a penchant for any box that features the LEGO logo, Anthony covers every aspect of the brick experience.

Reviews Writer
DAVE CARTLIDGE
Whether it's from Marvel Super Heroes, Friends, Technic or any other theme, Dave has the LEGO build know-how to assess the latest sets.

Build Curator
GENEVA DURAND
A 2x2 pillar of the community, Geneva is a respected member of the online creative LEGO scene with an expert eye for the best builds out there.

News Writer
RYAN EVERLETH
This LEGO aficionado has eclectic tastes, including Star Wars, Ideas and The Lord of the Rings. He always has a take on the latest news.


Photographer
PHIL WRIGHTON
Models never look better than when this prize-winning LEGO photographer has worked his magic to produce beautiful Blocks covers.

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FAST-TALKING & FUN BUILDING!
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Cover image: Phil Wrighton

Contributors
Matt Chiles, Will Tachick, Chris Wharfe

Thanks to…
The LEGO Group, featured builders, Luca Bellini, Birgitte Bülow, Matt Ellison, Samuel Liltorp Johnson, Alex Kastelic, Vincente Kenrice Klehr, Gudfinna Kristinsdottir, Chi Wing Lee, Jae Won Lee, John Longbottom, Jordan Paxton, Mike Psiaki, Sara Skahill, Signe Wiese Bundsbæk, Smarts Agency

Advertising Manager
Colin Smithson

Art Editor
Lorna Mansford, Hype Creative

Publisher
Tom Saunders
tom@silverbackpublishing.rocks
+447841 412199

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RECORD RESULTS CONTINUE

The LEGO Group's first half 2025 financial results continue to outpace the toy industry

Earnings reports may not be the most exhilarating of things for those whose focus is very much on their toys, but the LEGO Group's financial results for the first half of 2025 ensure that boxes of bricks aren't going anywhere. The company continued to see record breaking growth and carved out even greater market share while the wider toy industry barely grew.

In just the first six months of 2025, the LEGO Group's revenue shot up a staggering 12%, hitting DKK 34.6 billion (approx. £4 billion), up from DKK 31 billion (approx. £3.6 billion) in the first half of 2024. This led to a 10% increase in operating profit compared to last year, up to DKK 9 billion (approx. £1.4 billion), and an equal-percentage increase for net profit, increasing to DKK 6.5 billion (approx. £752 million).

The financial performance was driven by a 13% increase in consumer sales, with Europe, Middle East and Africa cited as the best performing markets. The Southeast Asian markets had no reported growth, despite the LEGO Group continuing to look to the region to expand its consumer base.

The company's sixth factory opened in Vietnam to service that part of the

world, the United States will see the opening of the seventh factory and a regional distribution centre in 2027, while existing factories in Mexico and Hungary are being expanded. The investments are part of a long-term strategy for sustained growth.

As it expands, the LEGO Group reports a continued commitment to sustainability initiatives, doubling the company's sustainable material usage compared to 2024. Its full year target is to purchase 60% of all materials come from sustainable sources and is on track to meet that goal.

"Children and their parents rightly expect us to play our part in shaping a more sustainable future. We remain fully focused on our mission to inspire and develop children everywhere —which includes ensuring that future generations inherit a healthy planet," said LEGO CEO Niels B. Christiansen. "We are privileged to be in a strong position to deliver on this mission — investing significantly in sustainable growth now and for the future."

The core of the LEGO Group's performance is centred around its product portfolio, which saw a record 314 sets released in the first half of 2025. Such a large catalogue may be daunting for hardcore collectors, but it has helped the company reach a wider audience, with LEGO Botanicals performing well during the Valentine's Day and Mother's Day gift-giving seasons, and ONE PIECE and BLUEY reaching new corners of the market. Star Wars, City, Icons and Technic were also named as bestsellers again.

"Above all the results reflect the enduring dedication and passion of our more than 31,000 colleagues around the world who have stayed focused on reaching more children with inspiring LEGO play experiences," added Niels.

Despite external challenges and a toy industry struggling to respond to ever-changing tastes, the LEGO Group continues to enjoy unprecedented financial success.

RYAN EVERLETH

The LEGO Group is increasing production capacity at factories around the world.

WHAT'S NEW & NEXT

POWERED BY... BRICKSET

1

4

COMING SOON

77255 Lightning McQueen
Theme: *Speed Champions*
Pieces: *270*
Price: *£22.99, $27.99, €27.99*

Privateer Frigate Fortuna
Theme: *BrickLink*
Pieces: *4,000*
Price: *TBC*

W.A.L.T.
Theme: *BrickLink*
Pieces: *663*
Price: *TBC*

Sushi Restaurant
Theme: *BrickLink*
Pieces: *3,409*
TBC

Alchemist's Shop
Theme: *BrickLink*
Pieces: *2,126*
Price: *TBC*

Antique Collection
Theme: *1,471*
Pieces: *TBC*
Price: *TBC*

30711 Play with Braille Bricks
Theme: *Braille Bricks*
Pieces: *10*
Price: *TBC*

2

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75419 Death Star
Theme: *Star Wars*
Pieces: *9,023*
Price: *£899.99, $999.99, €999.99*

2 **72046 Game Boy**
Theme: *Super Mario*
Pieces: *421*
Price: *£54.99, $59.99, €59.99*

76300 Arkham Asylum
Theme: *DC*
Pieces: *2,953*
Price: *£269.99, $299.99, €299.99*

40820 Up-Scaled Santa Minifigure
Theme: *Seasonal*
Pieces: *761*
Price: *£46.99, $54.99, €54.99*

75685 Emerald City Wall Art
Theme: *Wicked*
Pieces: *1,518*
Price: *£139.99, $159.99, €149.99*

1 **75689 Emerald City & Kiamo Ko Castle**
Theme: *Wicked*
Pieces: *860*
Price: *£74.99, $79.99, €79.99*

75691 Glinda & Elphaba Bookends
Theme: *Wicked*
Pieces: *1,327*
Price: *£109.99, $129.99, €119.99*

3

RETIRING SOON

77072 Peely Bone
Theme: *Fortnite*
Pieces: *1,414*
Price: *£89.99, $99.99, €99.99*

3 **77070 Durrr Burger**
Theme: *Fortnite*
Pieces: *193*
Price: *£12.99, $14.99, €14.99*

75582 Brick-Built Gru and Minions
Theme: *Despicable Me*
Pieces: *839*
Price: *£49.99, $54.99, €54.99*

21343 Viking Village
Theme: *Ideas*
Pieces: *2,103*
Price: *£124.99, $129.99, €139.99*

4 **21335 Motorized Lighthouse**
Theme: *Ideas*
Pieces: *2,065*
Price: *£259.99, $299.99, €299.99*

31154 Forest Animals: Red Fox
Theme: *Creator*
Pieces: *667*
Price: *£44.99, $49.99, €49.99*

31137 Adorable Dogs
Theme: *Creator*
Pieces: *475*
Price: *£24.99, $29.99, €29.99*

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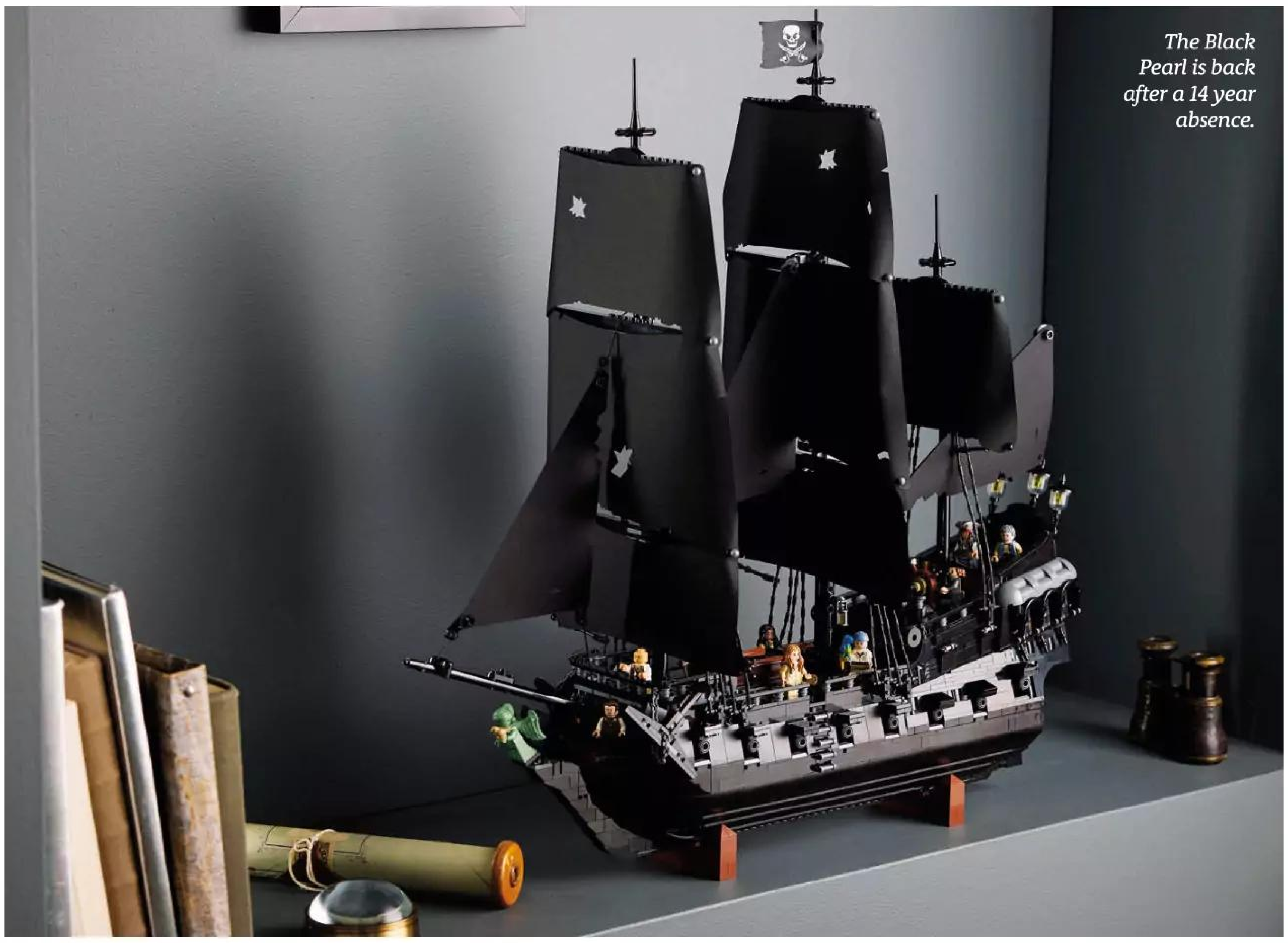
RETURN TO THE CARIBBEAN

Build 10365 Captain Jack Sparrow's Pirate Ship and hoist the (singular) colour



The Black Pearl is back after a 14 year absence.

LEGO Pirates of the Caribbean has had a quiet decade and a half since the original theme ran in 2011 — the only set released in the interim was 2017's 71042 Silent Mary in conjunction with the fifth movie. There's no new movie this time around, but the Disney franchise is making its triumphant return with 10365 Captain Jack Sparrow's Pirate Ship, which recreates the iconic Black Pearl.

With 2,862 pieces, 10365 is the largest LEGO set inspired by Pirates of the Caribbean set to date, dwarfing the original 2011 version's 804 pieces. With those 2,000 extra pieces comes a significant bump in size and detail. "On sailing ships you really need to capture the curvature of the hull, so that was something I really tried to explore," said Design Master Mike Psiaki.

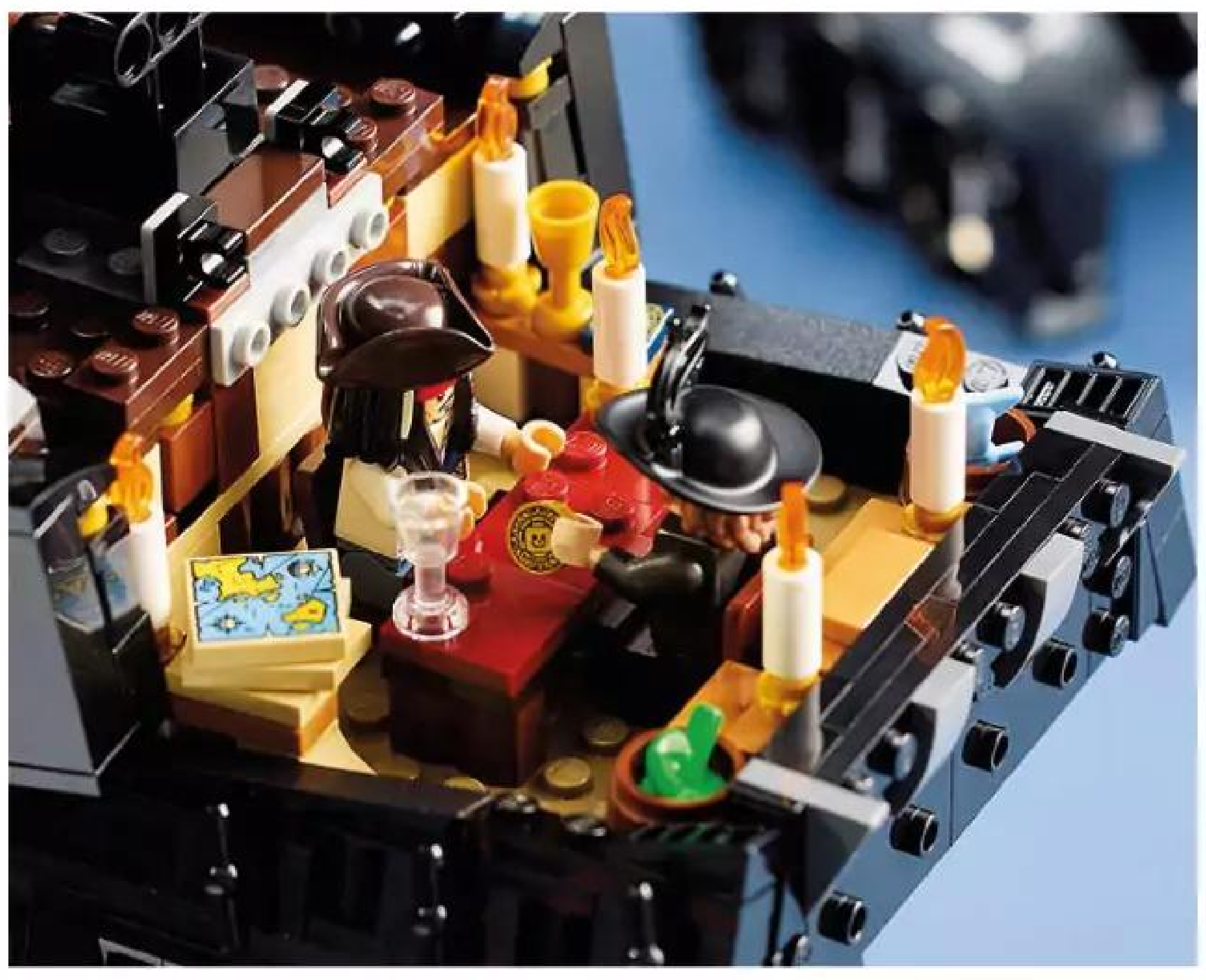
The complete hull is easy to display through the use of two small stands, or the bottom can be removed to give the impression that the Black Pearl is sailing through the water.

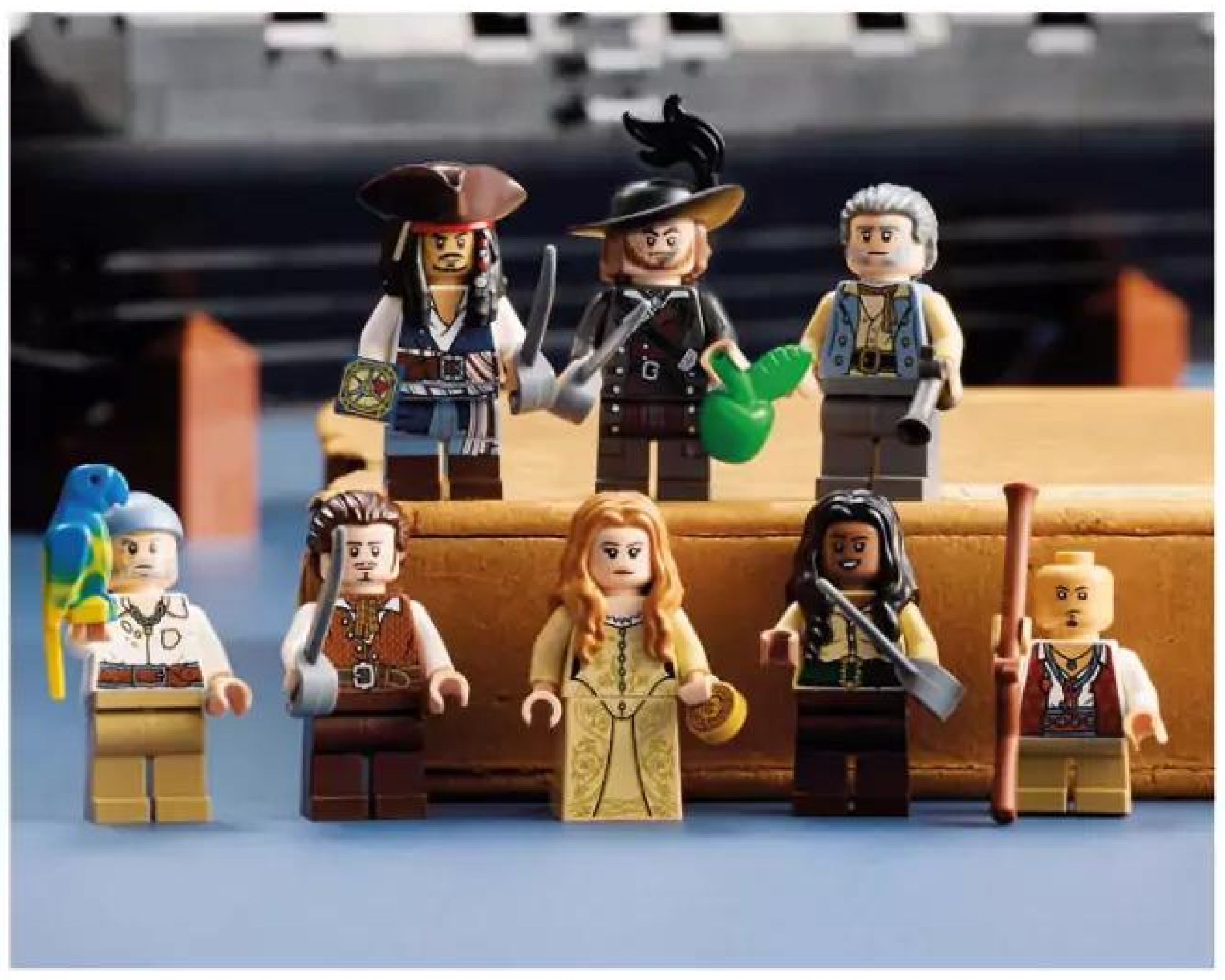
Interior details include a whole host of cannons, which can be moved in unison thanks to a Technic mechanism hidden in the stern. Other interior details include the captain's cabin, a cargo hold and of course plenty of deck space up top.

Eight minifigures depicting the series' most iconic characters make up the crew. Jack Sparrow, Barbossa, Gibbs, Elizabeth and Will have all appeared as minifigures before. They make use of 14 years' worth of improved decoration and techniques, though Jack is the only one to have dual moulded legs. Anamaria, Cotton and Marty all make their minifigure debuts. Together they form a respectable roster, but fan-favourites Pintel and Ragetti are not joining the crew this time around.

10365 Captain Jack Sparrow's Pirate Ship is available now and retails for £299.99 / $379.99 / €349.99.

RYAN EVERLETH





Far right: *You can recreate spooky scenes in the cabin.*
Right: *It is common maritime practice for a ship to have a crew.*

Daniel's take

"Pirate ships are the perfect LEGO sets."

Pirate ships are the ultimate subject matter for LEGO sets. These magnificent models capture the perfect fusion of scale, awesome visuals and play. It is a combination that few other types of LEGO sets, or toys of any type, achieve.

The foundation of this magic is that tall ships align naturally with the proportions of minifigures. Hulls, masts, sails and other elements can be scaled to the LEGO populace at a size that is substantive and accurate without breaking the bank. Ships scaled to tiny figures are typically underwhelming and ships for action figures are awkwardly sized in order to remain affordable, neither of which is the case with LEGO vessels. The models feel big, imposing and realistic; they look like what you picture when you imagine a ship sailing the high seas.

An additional factor at play is that the sails give the sets volume and a striking silhouette, making the ships feel enormous and impressive without requiring a king's ransom of bricks. The use of crisp fabric that doesn't droop and instead appears to be billowing has been a hallmark of these sets from the beginning and ensures that the models seem far larger than their raw part count would suggest.

Finally, there is the sheer depth of play potential. A single pirate ship set opens an entire world of adventures. Cannons can be fired in thrilling sea battles, minifigures can storm the decks in daring raids and the crew can explore distant islands in search of treasure. Children can pit their ship against rival crews, monstrous sea creatures or the perils of uncharted waters right up to the world's end and beyond. No other LEGO theme delivers such an expansive range of stories within a single product.

The magnificent legacy of LEGO pirate ships continues with the release of 10365 Captain Jack Sparrow's Pirate Ship. In this latest evolution, designers have built upon everything which makes these sets great by enhancing the hull with additional brick-built bulk, making the vessel look and feel even more substantial. The increased realism and dramatic visual demonstrate that pirate ships continue to offer the ultimate subject matter.e Ship.

Brick CENTRAL

Get involved

BrickCentral is an online community of photographers who take creative photos of LEGO models and minifigures. We've always got some fun activities for LEGO fans to do like photography themes, contests, tips and community projects. Our Discord, Instagram and Tumblr communities are home to thousands of members from around the world who want to share and discover LEGO photography.

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Discord: *discord.gg/HwkZFH5*

Clockwise from top left: *@im_a_saudi, @mumubrix, @sillylittlebricks, @thebrickdwarf, @the_aphol, @unhearted_bricks*

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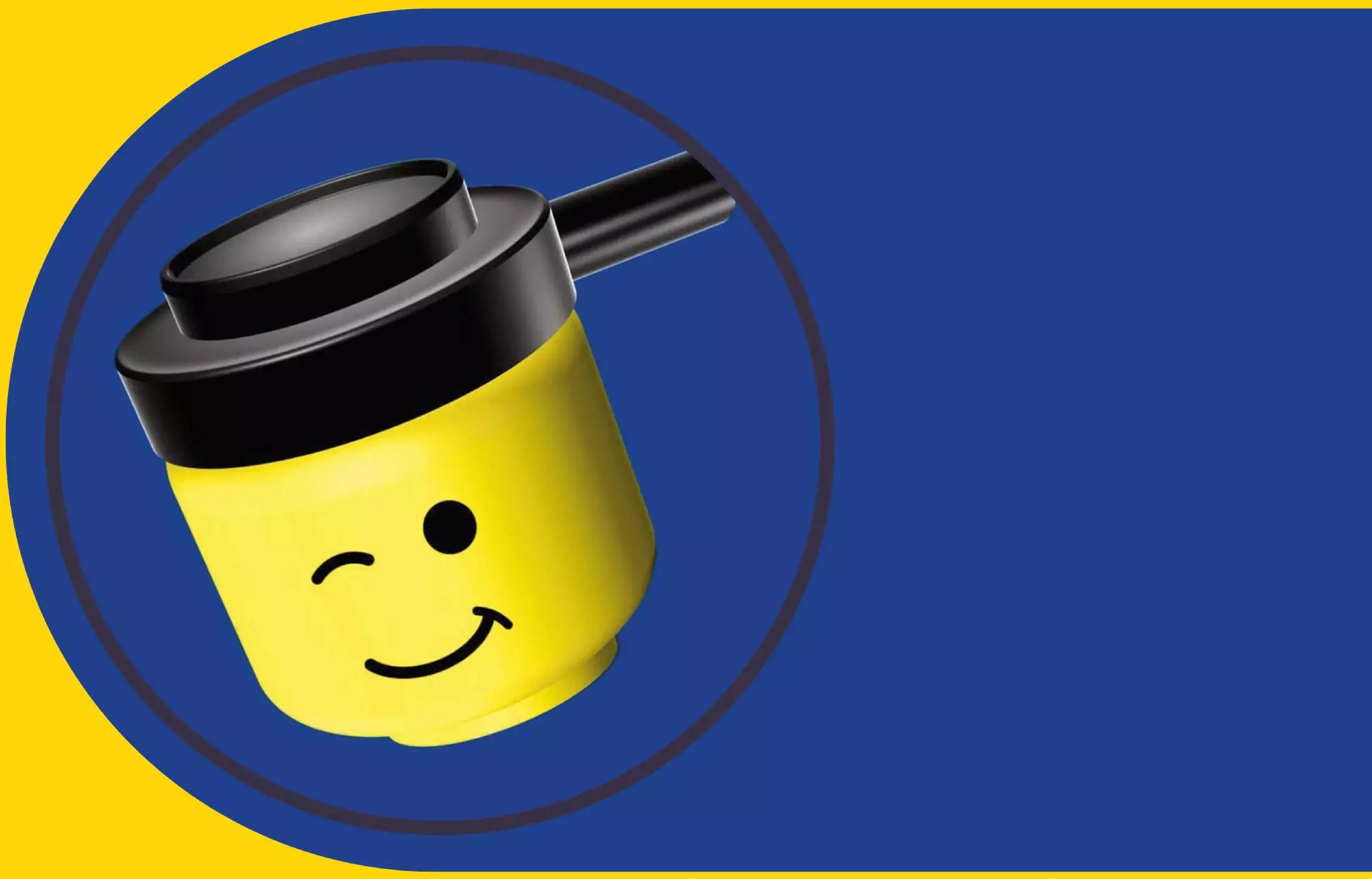

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Better than gold?

Matt Chiles shares his wisdom from the block market floor, cutting through the many myths around investing in and reselling LEGO sets

You may have noticed an expensive Peter Jackson minifigure make the LEGO news a couple of months ago when it was auctioned. It was one of only about 20 that were made, back when LEGO The Hobbit sets were coming out. It sold for $38,000.

That price suggests that LEGO minifigures are where investing is at… or maybe not. Let's look around. There are definitely some valuable minifigures out there, like Mr. Gold and certain San Diego Comic Con exclusives – plus some rarer, but generally more widely available figures, like Boba Fett from 10123 Cloud City. But unless it is a figure you can get hold of, it is probably not something to look at investing in right now. Cloud City Boba Fetts, Mr. Golds and Peter Jacksons are all hard to find.

I recently attended BrickCon in Seattle, the oldest continually operating LEGO convention in the world. While I was there, I was looking for better minifigures for my old 497 Galaxy Explorer – ones that weren't yellowed and chewed on, without the gold paint all rubbed off.

I found three nice ones from a dealer – rarer first-generation figs with hollow torsos and gold in great condition. I got them for $12 each. That seemed steep to me for simple astronauts that were pretty widely available between 1978 and 1982. But let's consider if they would have been a good investment…

Imagine that I went back in time to 1980 and invested $100 in Classic Space astronauts, which would have bought me about 100 minifigures. Now, 45 years later, they are worth $12 each and my $100 would have become $1200. By simple interest they would have grown an impressive 25% per year!

That looks good… but cash investments are generally measured on compound interest, where every year the investment, plus previously gained interest, receive interest. Had I invested that $100 at just 5.7%, with compounding interest for 45 years, it also would be worth about $1200.

Alternatively, if I had taken $100 and invested it in the S&P 500 in 1980, reinvesting the dividends paid by my investment, I would have $15,387 today, and an annualised return of 11.84% (or simple interest on principle of 340% per year, which shows how simple interest on principle is a questionable metric). Thus, stocks would have paid quite a bit better than Classic Space minifigures in the long term. To match that return each of my Classic Space guys would now have to be worth $154 instead of $12.

On a practical note, should you buy that new £999.99 75419 Death Star for the minifigures alone? At 9,023 pieces, the price per piece is approximately 11 cents. At 40 minifigures, the price per minifigure is about $26, and you get almost 9,000 free parts. Are the minifigures worth $26 each – or will they soon be?

There might be a precedent to be found by looking at 75159 Death Star, which retailed for $499.99 when it retired in in 2020. The minifigures alone, in new condition, are worth around $500. Is that normal though?

- 75394 Star Destroyer is priced at $159.99. The minifigures are worth $94 or 59% of the retail price.
- 75409 Jango Fett's Starship is priced at $299.99. The minifigures are worth $84 or 28% of the retail price.
- 75433 Jango Fett's Starship is priced at $69.99. The minifigures are worth $53 or 76% of the retail price.

There may be more information to be found in sets that retired around a decade ago:

- 9488 Elite Clone Trooper & Commando Droid Battle Pack retailed for $12.99. The minifigures are worth $70 or 538% of the retail price.
- 9493 X-wing Starfighter retailed for $49.99. The minifigures are worth $44 or 73% of the retail price.
- 9494 Anakin's Jedi Interceptor retailed for $39.99. The minifigures are worth $88 or 220% of the retail price.
- 9495 Gold Leader's Y-wing Starfighter retailed for $49.99. The minifigures are worth $50 or 100% of the retail price.
- 9515 The Malevolence retailed for $119.99. The minifigures are worth $120 or 100% of the retail price.

In some cases the minifigure values appear to either very much be driving – or being driven by – the set's value. If you are a parts person, you can save quite a bit on your parts by immediately selling the minifigures – or you can wait a few years in the hope that some figures become even more valuable.

Will they increase in value like an old Space astronaut? If so, then in 45 years minifigures worth $100 will be worth $1,200. Is that likely to happen? Would they be worth $15,000? For most minifigures, I doubt it. From a long-term investment perspective, a diversified portfolio of common stocks will probably return better.

But that isn't as fun. Don't forget to play with those minifigures – I'm certainly playing with my Classic Space guys, even if I do wear off more of the gold printing in the process.

MATT CHILES

The information in this column about plastic bricks is not intended to constitute – and should not be construed as – investment advice.

Gaming Download

DAIGO ARRIVES IN ODYSSEY WITH NEW COMBAT MECHANICS

Players can now face Daigo Mask Maker across the biomes while mastering a revamped combat system

LEGO FORTNITE
ODYSSEY

It has been a quiet few months for LEGO Fortnite Odyssey, with barely any new content and only minor patches. For those who favour the original version of the brick game, it felt like the developers were focussing on the new Expeditions mode instead. In Expeditions, players become heroes to face the evil forces of Mask Maker Daigo. But now that villain is using his teleporting spires to arrive in LEGO Fortnite Odyssey.

Players can now encounter Daigo when walking along the paths that are scattered across the different biomes in Odyssey worlds. So be alert for any masked enemies, as the chances are high that Daigo will be among them. To make defeating the villainous overlord more achievable, you are able to refine corrupted crystals, which you can use to craft weaponry. You can also apply the new Spire Wrath IV Rune to help dodge Daigo's attacks.

Dodging and damage are just some of the latest changes to combat. LEGO Fortnite Odyssey has been completely revamped in the latest update. Instead of hearts to track health, players now have a health bar with a maximum of 400 HP (equivalent to the previous maximum of 10 hearts). Damage has also been scaled accordingly, with new number ratings to help balance out the combat system.

Chests are scaled differently too. All chest sizes have been increased so that they store more resources, weaponry and other items that you find around the islands, which will make organising your inventory less onerous. For example, you can make a chest specifically for an arsenal of weaponry and charms ready to face Daigo.

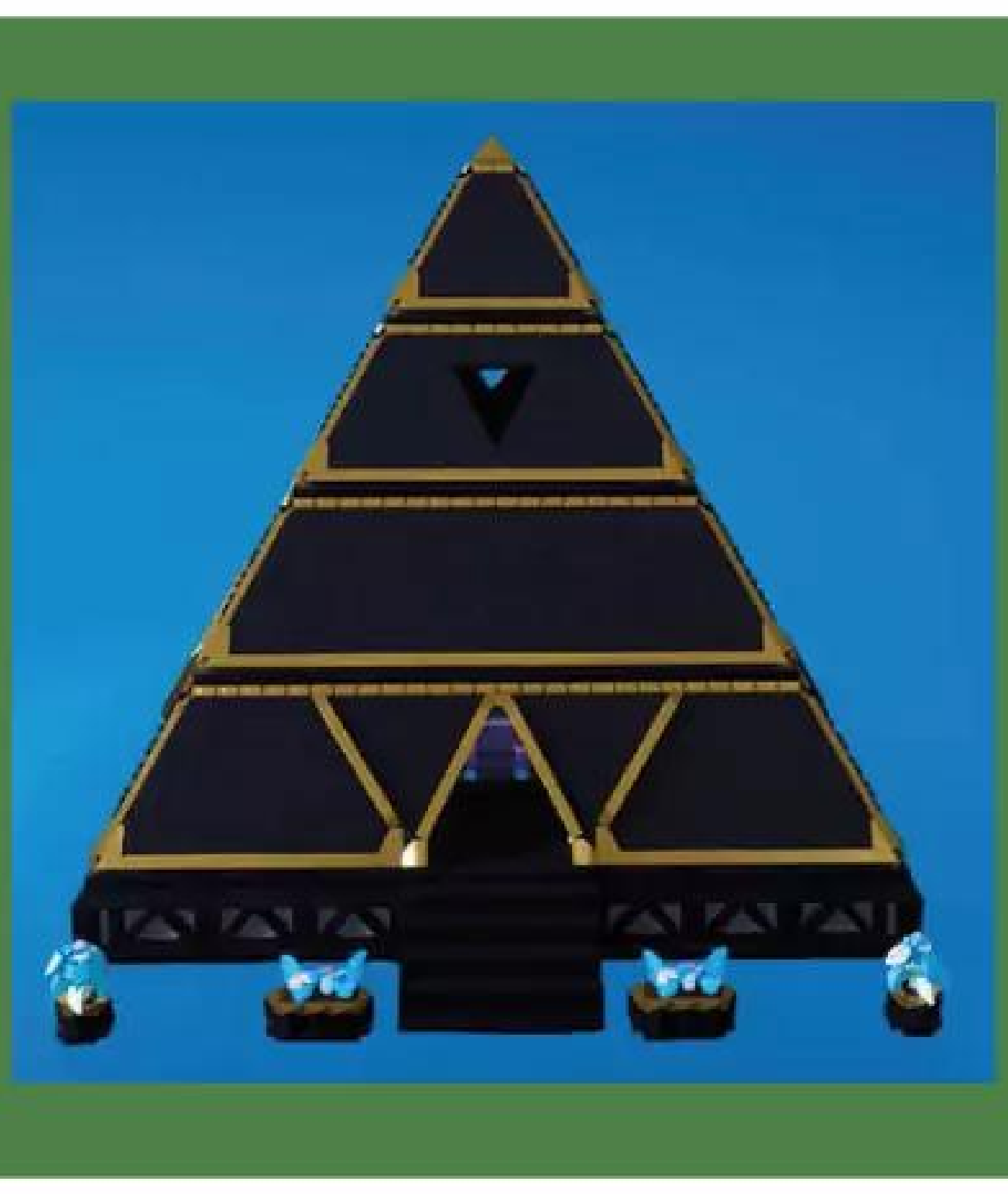
LEGO Fortnite Brick Life has been treated to some improvements as well. New map markers make it easier to track tasks and locations. There is also a new icon for your chosen home. More customisation options have been added to the game, including changing light colours for lamps, additional flower beds and extra gardening supplies. If you don't have all the creds for these new items, then you will be pleased to know that players can now give creds to each other, whether you intend to deposit them at an ATM in Brick Bay or use them for a shopping spree.

LEGO Fortnite Odyssey and LEGO Fortnite Brick Life are available to play now on PC and all consoles with the v37.40 update.

KAT REES-JAUKE

Daft Punk Pyramid

Have you ever wanted to build your own pyramid using bricks? Daft Punk Pyramid brings together music and history in a totally unexpected way. Its dark façade is highlighted with golden accents, but its true colours are revealed when dance emoting. Each wall of the pyramid lights up in an electric show of colours, which is perfect if you want to create a concert or rave night for villagers, especially in the Beach or Dry Valley biomes. On the inside, the two levels are decorated to look like a dance floor, with colourful tiling that matches the techno vibe.



New Fortnite characters

Felinos

Named by some brilliant word play on felon, Felinos is a cat escapee from Kata Tech's ominous Re-Lynxed lab. Melding typical feline features with a mech-like body, this character wears an ornate golden mask with a hood shaped to their ears. Gold and metallic grey combine in a way that's both elegant and spooky.

Magmatic Carver

This ferocious knight made from lava is the perfect skin for any LEGO Castle fan. A cracked breastplate barely holds his body together and flaming eyes peer out from behind a forged helm. If that isn't dramatic enough, he even has chains that double as a belt.

Dr Theodore Flyesbee

With red compound eyes, antennae and proboscis, this is not your typical doctor. Flyesbee is a fly with a medical licence and has his trusty pager attached to his doctor's coat. A brilliantly unique character that flies against scientific norms, it's one of the game's quirkier skins.

Fortnite phraseology

HP

HP is the acronym for Health Points, which is the most common way of tracking a character's status in any combat game. It's an easy number to visualise and understand when losing HP in battle against enemies. With the latest Odyssey update the maximum HP for a player is 400.

This has also slightly changed food and drink items, which now restore a certain number of HP rather than hearts. Currently there's no number attached to a food item and how much HP it restores, but pumpkin pie, pizzas and spicy burgers remain the best recipes for restoring health quickly.

Contest of the Month

Get involved

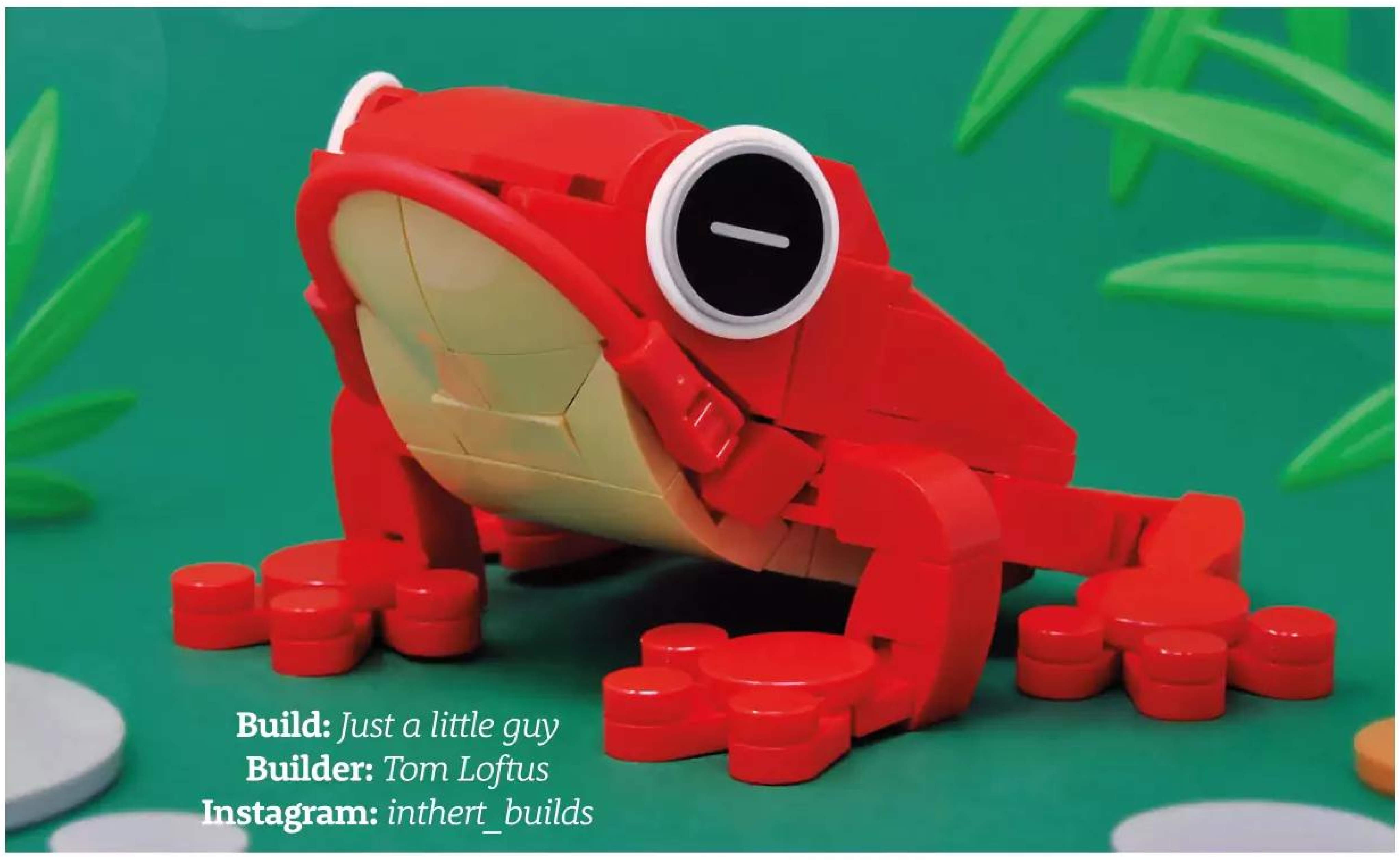
Flickr: *flickr.com/groups/frogust*

FROGUST

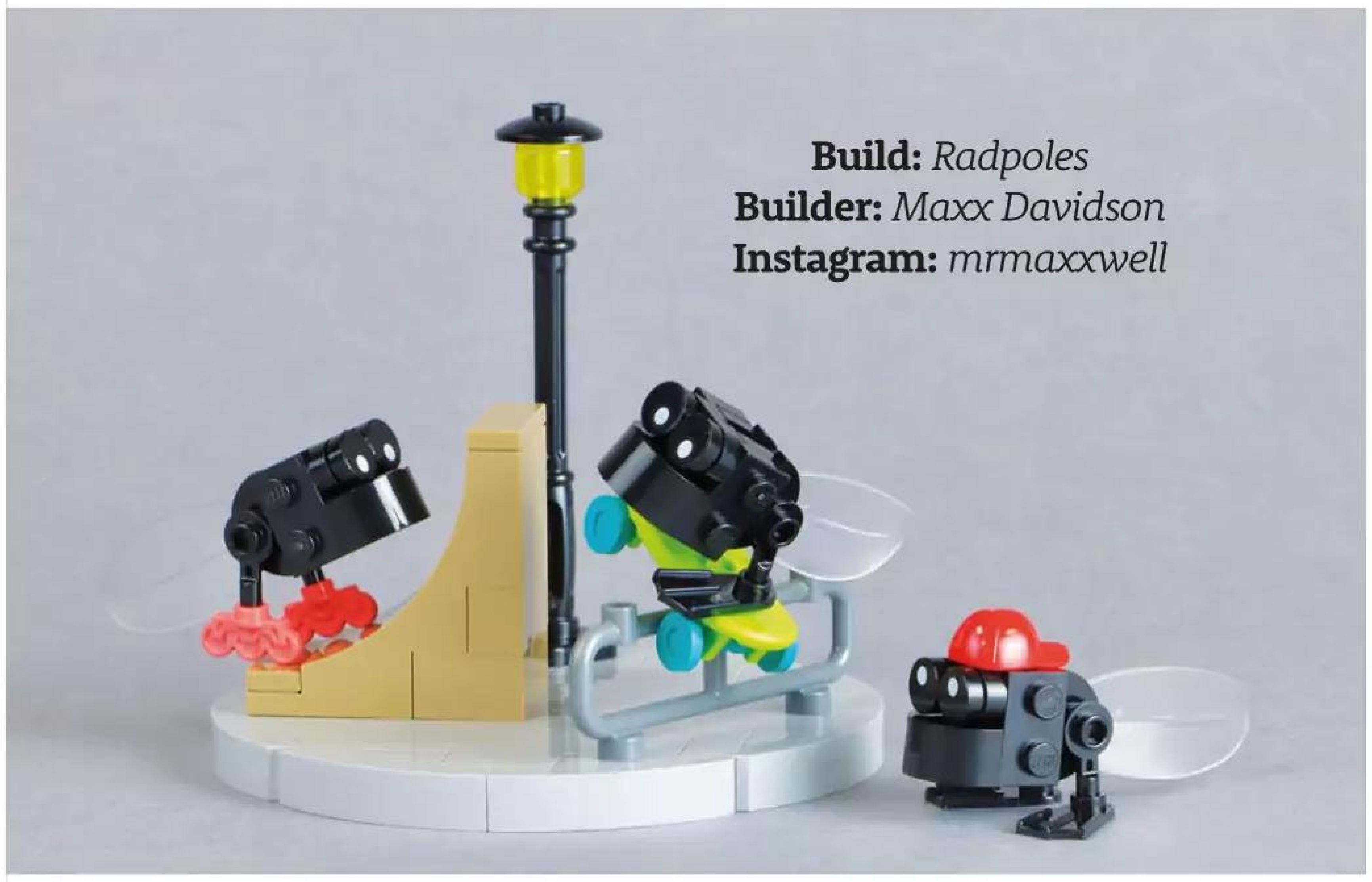
Frogs have leapt into the limelight this year with the start of a new themed month

Believe it or not, frogs hold a special place in many LEGO builders' hearts. The iconic LEGO frog element frequently shows up in LEGO sets, whether tucked into a corner as an actual frog or used in all sorts of clever ways, from Bonsai flowers to table legs. Over the years, the appreciation for frogs within the building community has grown to cover brick-built frogs as well, so it's no wonder that builders jumped at the challenge when the suggestion came up for a new themed month. Frogust was born in 2024 and came into its own this year, with frogs of every size, shape and colour springing to life.

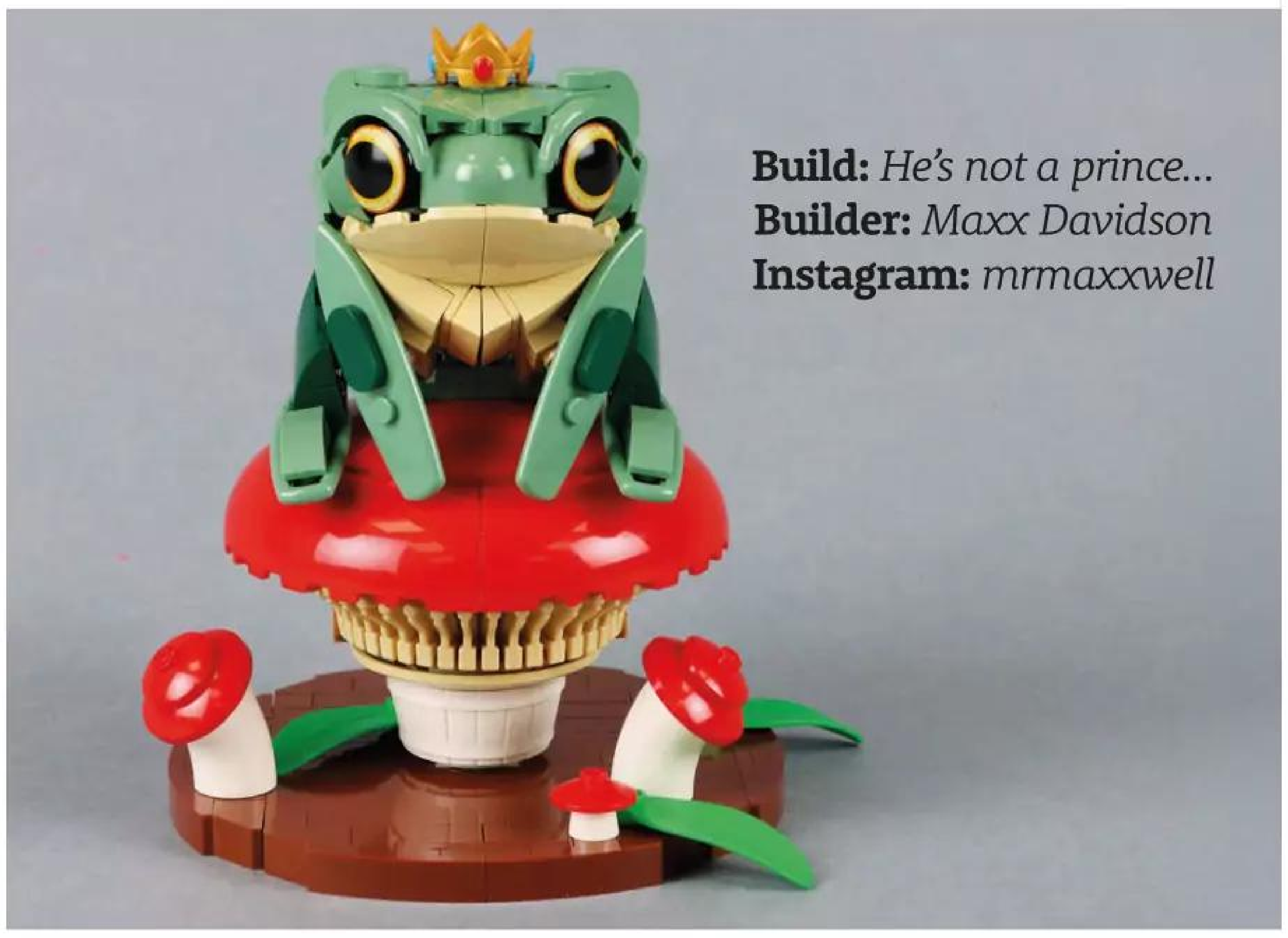
GENEVA DURAND



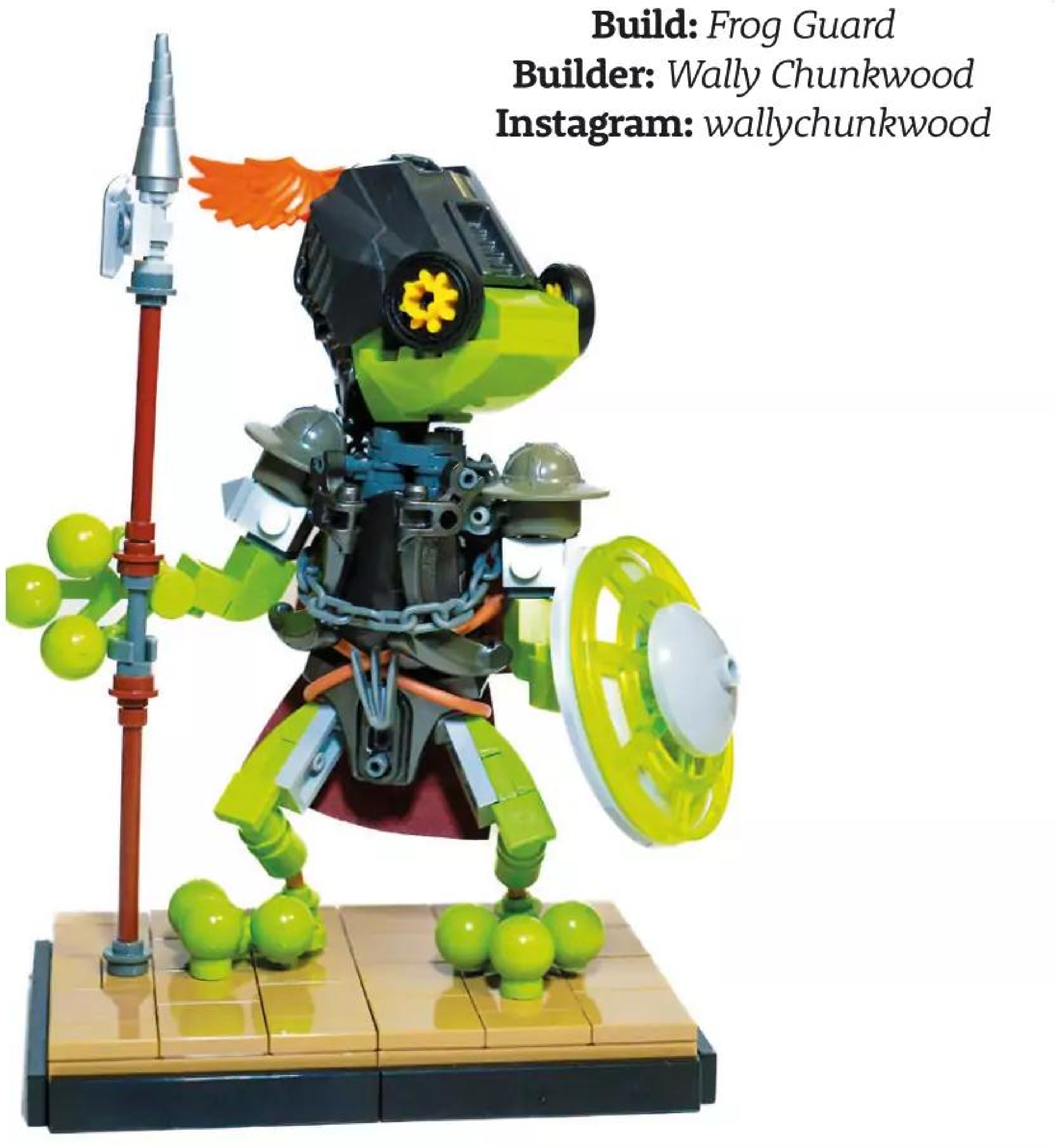
Build: *Just a little guy*
Builder: *Tom Loftus*
Instagram: *inthert_builds*



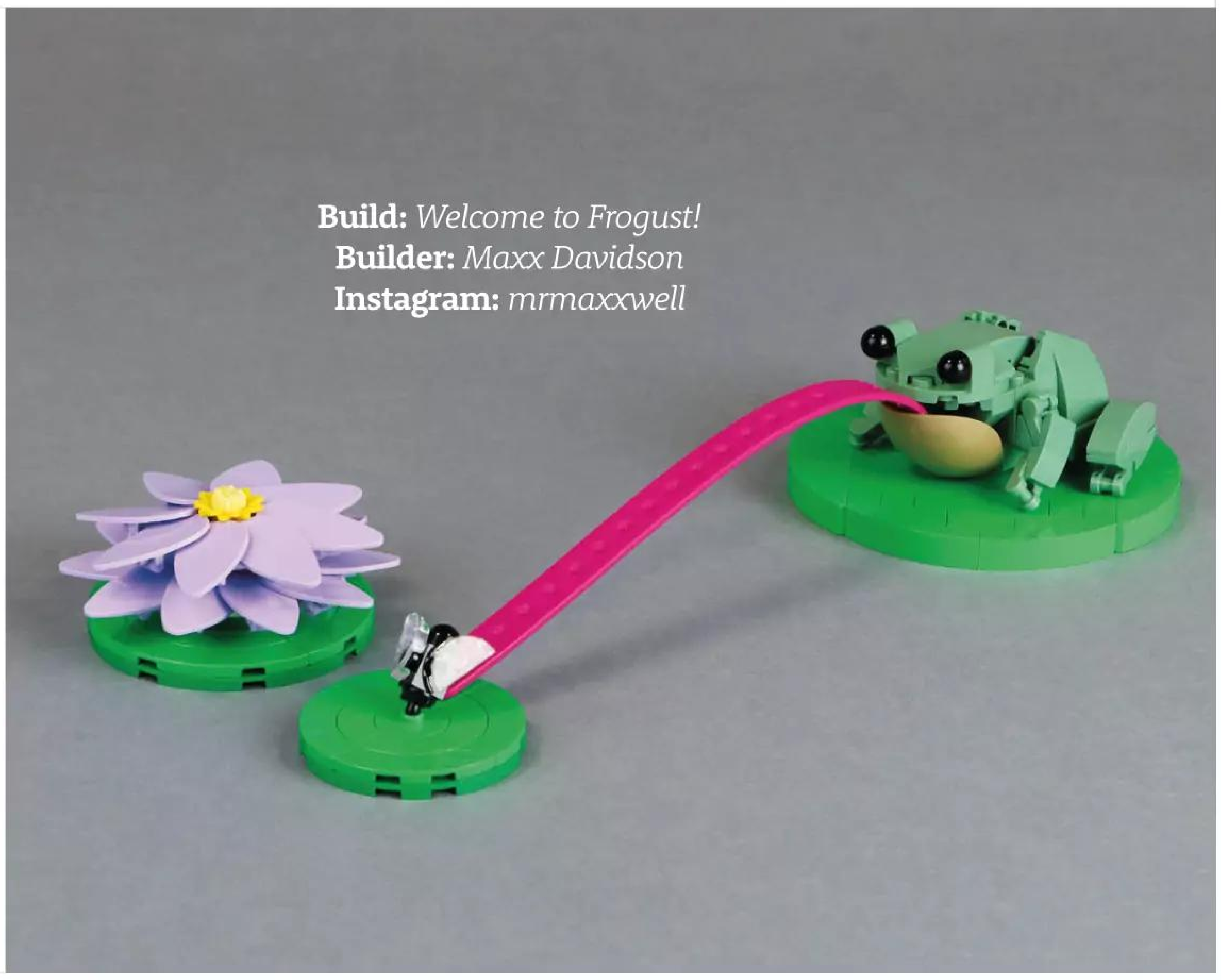
Build: *Radpoles*
Builder: *Maxx Davidson*
Instagram: *mrmaxxwell*



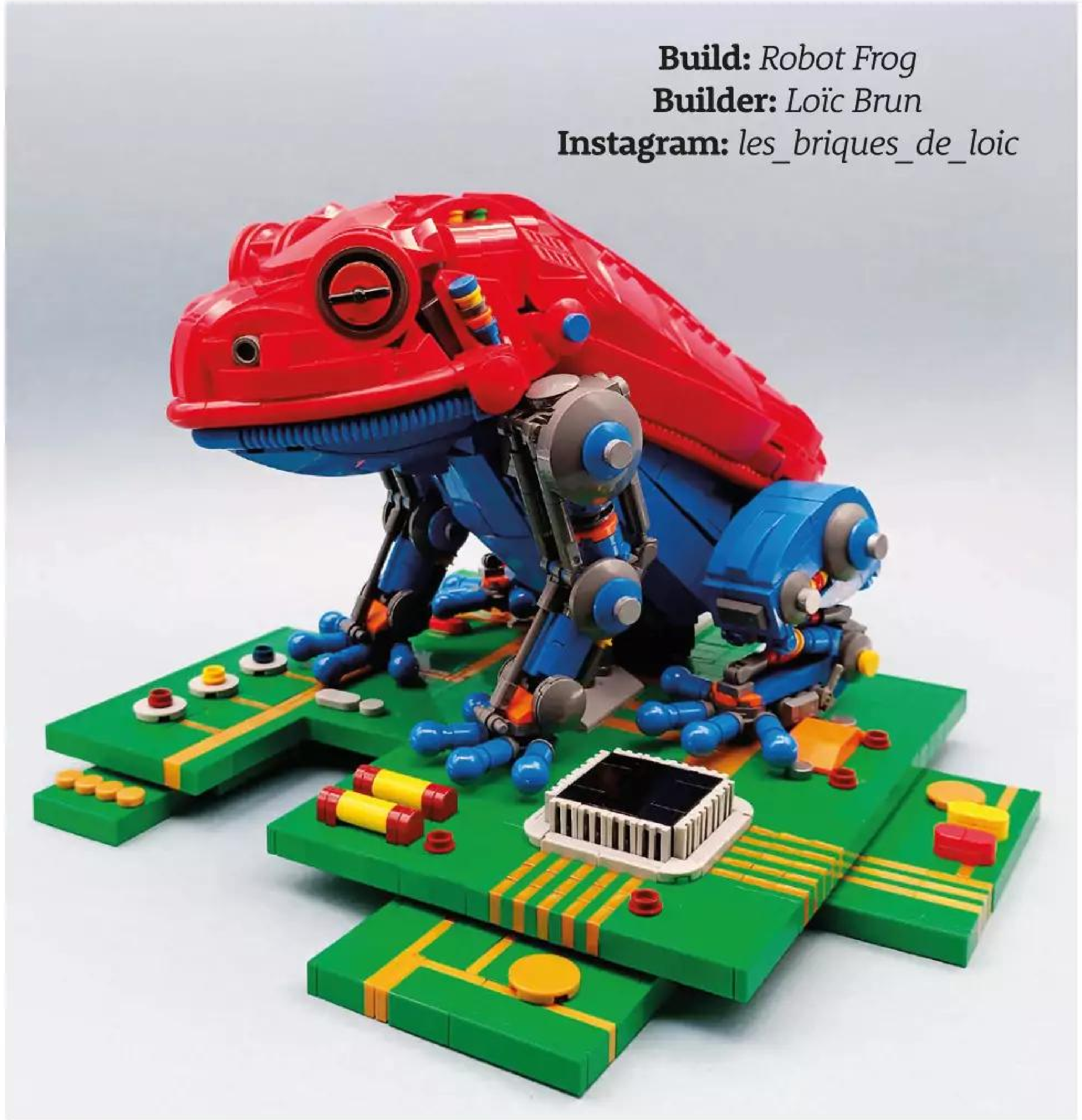
Build: *He's not a prince...*
Builder: *Maxx Davidson*
Instagram: *mrmaxxwell*



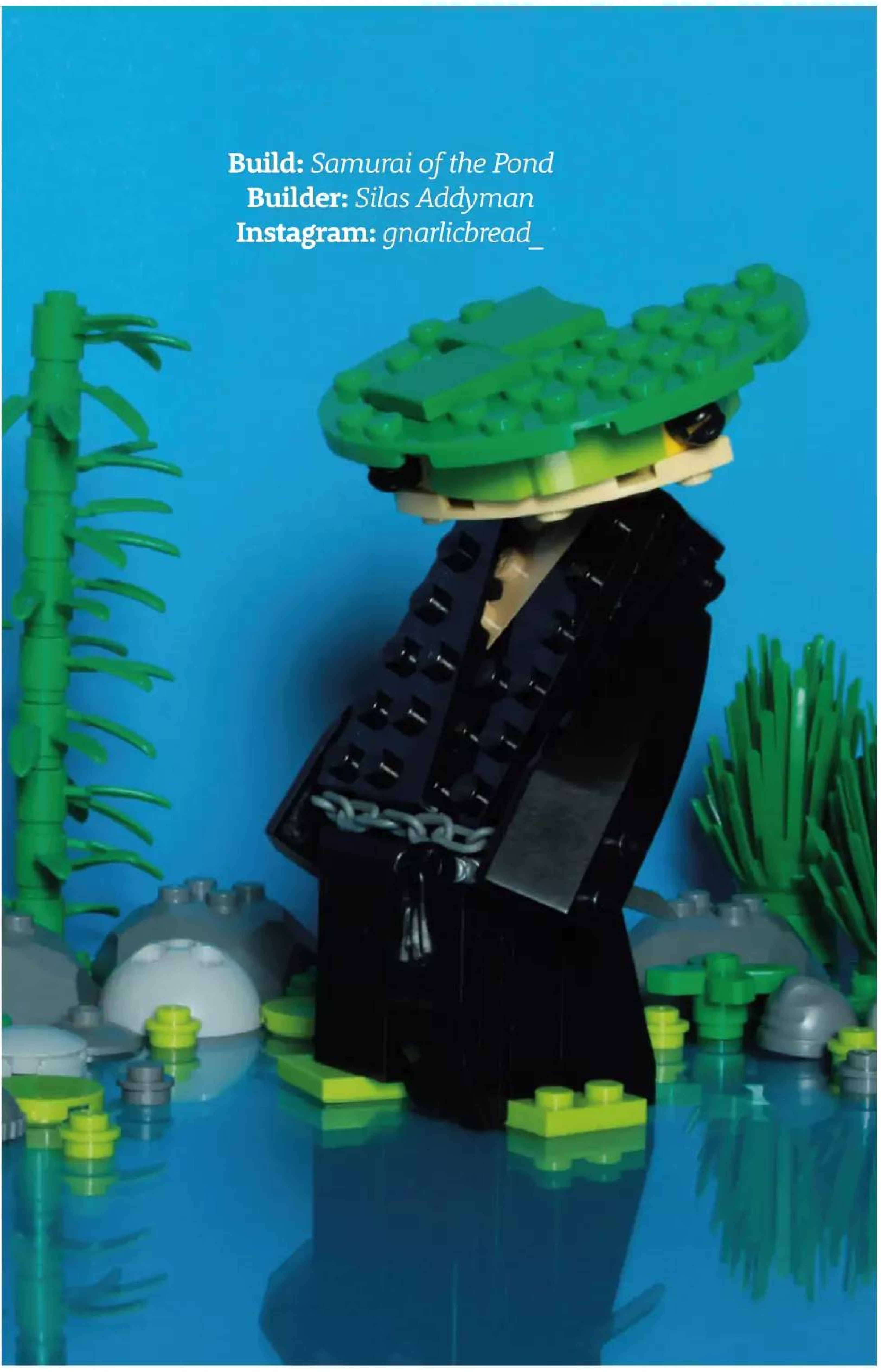
Build: *Frog Guard*
Builder: *Wally Chunkwood*
Instagram: *wallychunkwood*



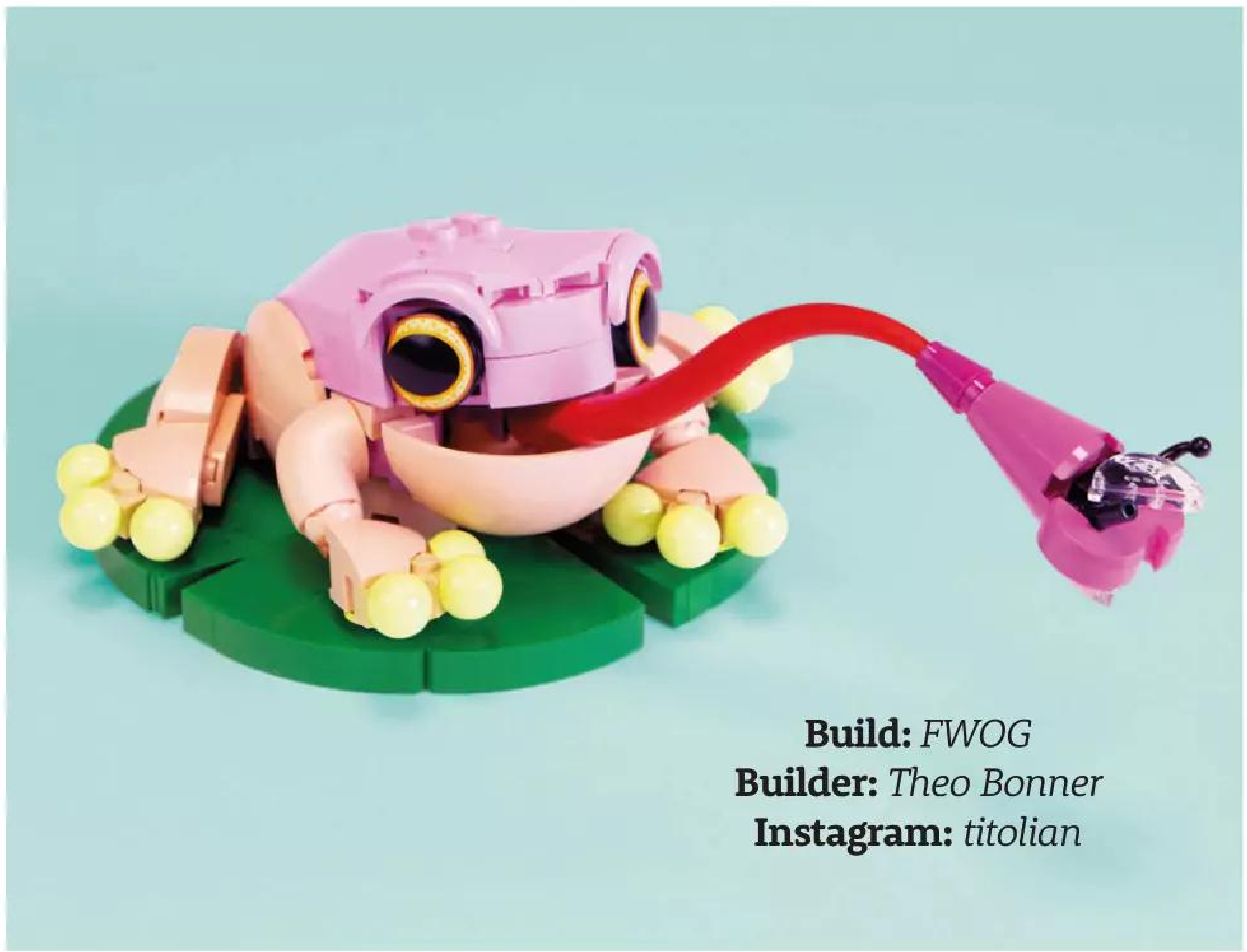
Build: *Welcome to Frogust!*
Builder: *Maxx Davidson*
Instagram: *mrmaxxwell*



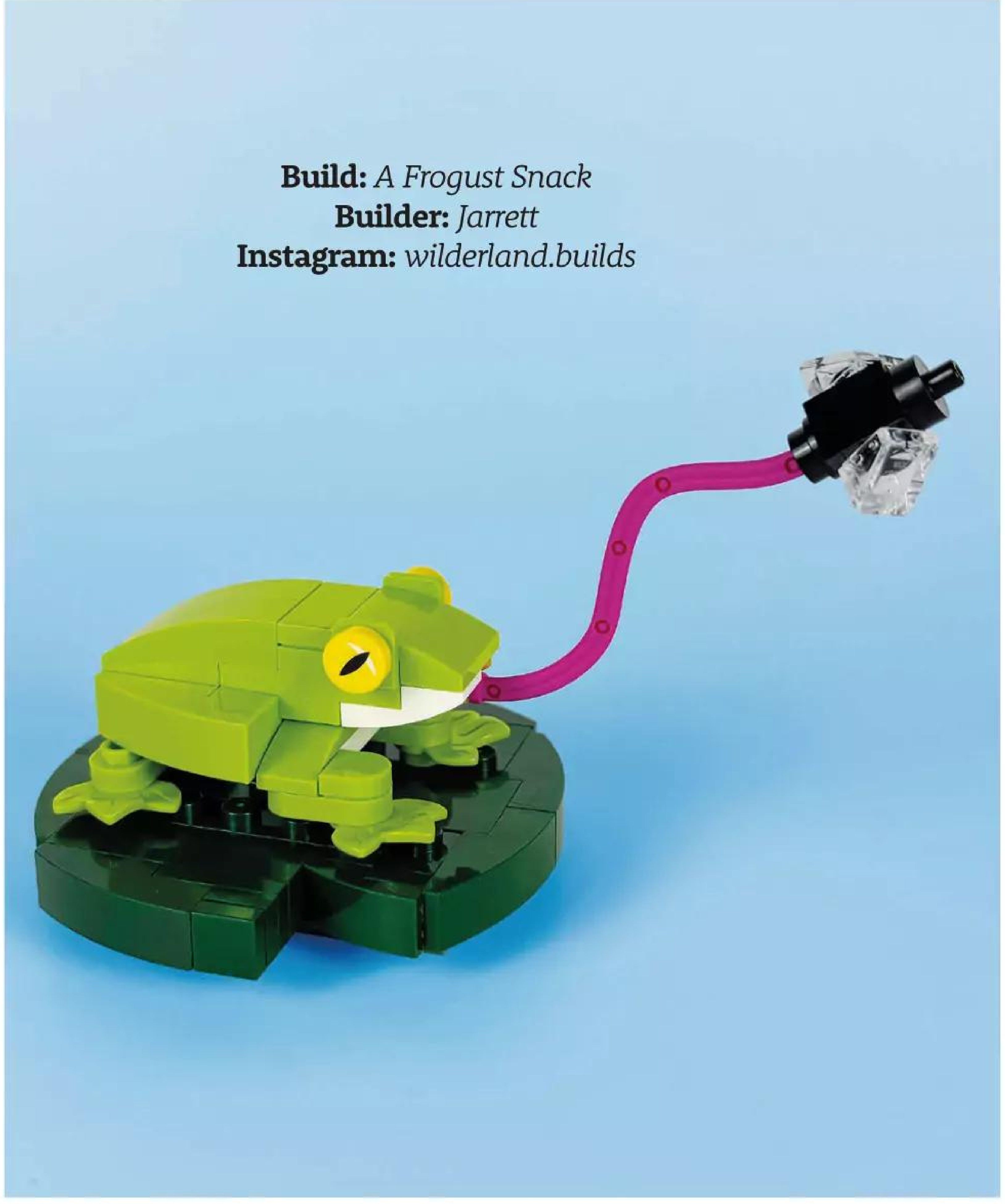
Build: *Robot Frog*
Builder: *Loïc Brun*
Instagram: *les_briques_de_loic*



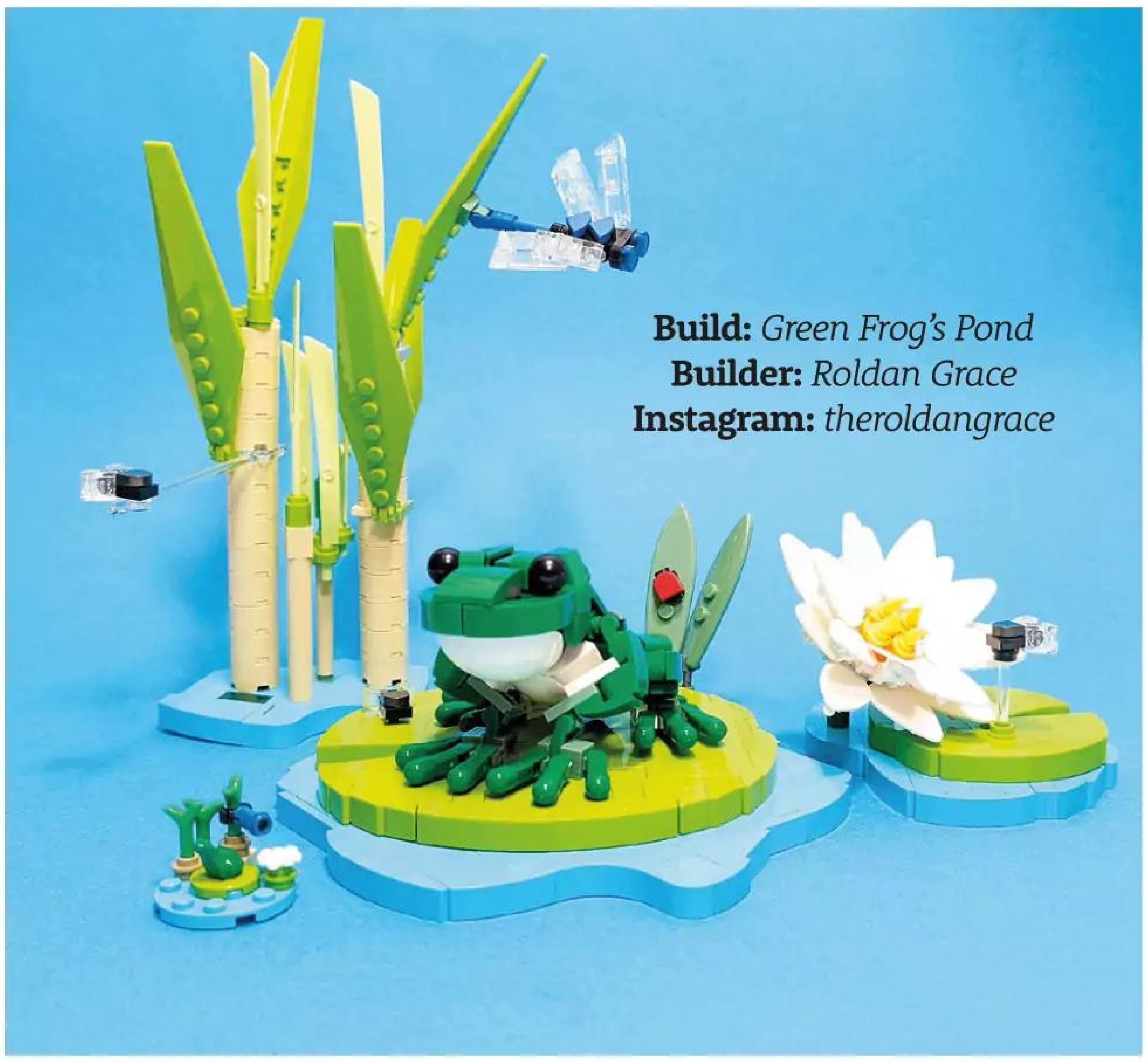
Build: *Samurai of the Pond*
Builder: *Silas Addyman*
Instagram: *gnarlicbread_*



Build: *FWOG*
Builder: *Theo Bonner*
Instagram: *titolian*



Build: *A Frogust Snack*
Builder: *Jarrett*
Instagram: *wilderland.builds*



Build: *Green Frog's Pond*
Builder: *Roldan Grace*
Instagram: *theroldangrace*

IDEAS
Latest

146
LEGO IDEAS

Second 2025 LEGO® Ideas Review
Results coming in Spring 2026

LARGEST EVER REVIEW PHASE UNDERWAY

The second LEGO Ideas is a record breaker, with more fan models than ever before making it to 10,000 votes

There was once a time when gathering the coveted 10,000 supporters required on LEGO Ideas was seen as an almost insurmountable feat. But as the platform has continued to grow in popularity over the last decade, that magical milestone has become more and more achievable, thanks to a larger userbase seeking out the next great LEGO Ideas set and occasional moments of virality on different platforms.

If LEGO Ideas' soaring popularity was not evident already, the 146 qualifying projects entered into the Second 2025 Review make it indisputable. To put that number into context, it's not just the first time a review phase has hit triple digits, it more than doubles the previous record of 71 projects in the First 2023 Review.

Regular Blocks readers will recognise a few projects that have featured on this very page: Aggravator's K-Pop Demon Hunter's: The Tiger and the Three-Eyed Crow, Mitsuru Nikaido's Manta Ray Mech and eat.sleep.build.repeat's This is Fine.

That leaves a mere 143 other projects in the review, which is too many to even list within 400 words. There is some interesting thematic consistency across the projects; two attempt to bring SpongeBob back to the brick, a few recreate retro tech and there's some vying to be Ancient Rome's first set. There's also Clippy.

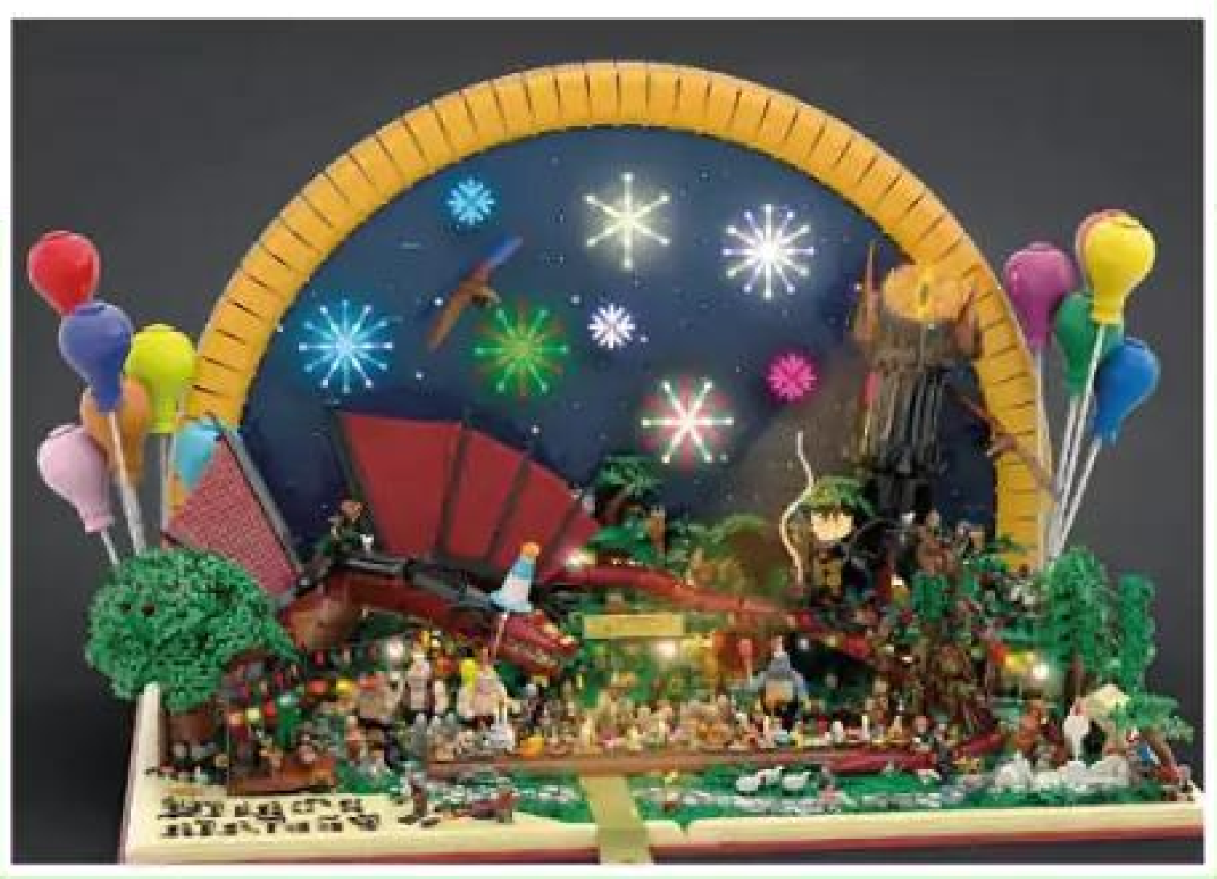
All 146 project creators will be enjoying the feeling of success. Even with so many entering this review phase, earning 10,000 supporters remains a great accomplishment and it's excellent that the LEGO Ideas platform has become as popular as it has.

However, there is no indication that the massive roster of projects will lead to more being approved than usual. That means out of the 146, fans should only expect two or three to become official sets. Another two or so may also make it into the Parking Lot to receive further evaluation, but the majority are likely to end their LEGO Ideas journey here. But any projects not accepted will have the opportunity to revise and resubmit — something the fan designers behind 21360 Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory did to realise their dream.

Of course, the LEGO Ideas team may choose to accept more projects from this unprecedented phase than usual, but only time will tell. Results are expected in Spring 2026. In the meantime, 21361 Gremlins: Gizmo and 21362 Mineral Collection recently released, continuing one of LEGO Ideas' busiest years yet: 2025 has seen the launch of nine sets and there are two months to go...

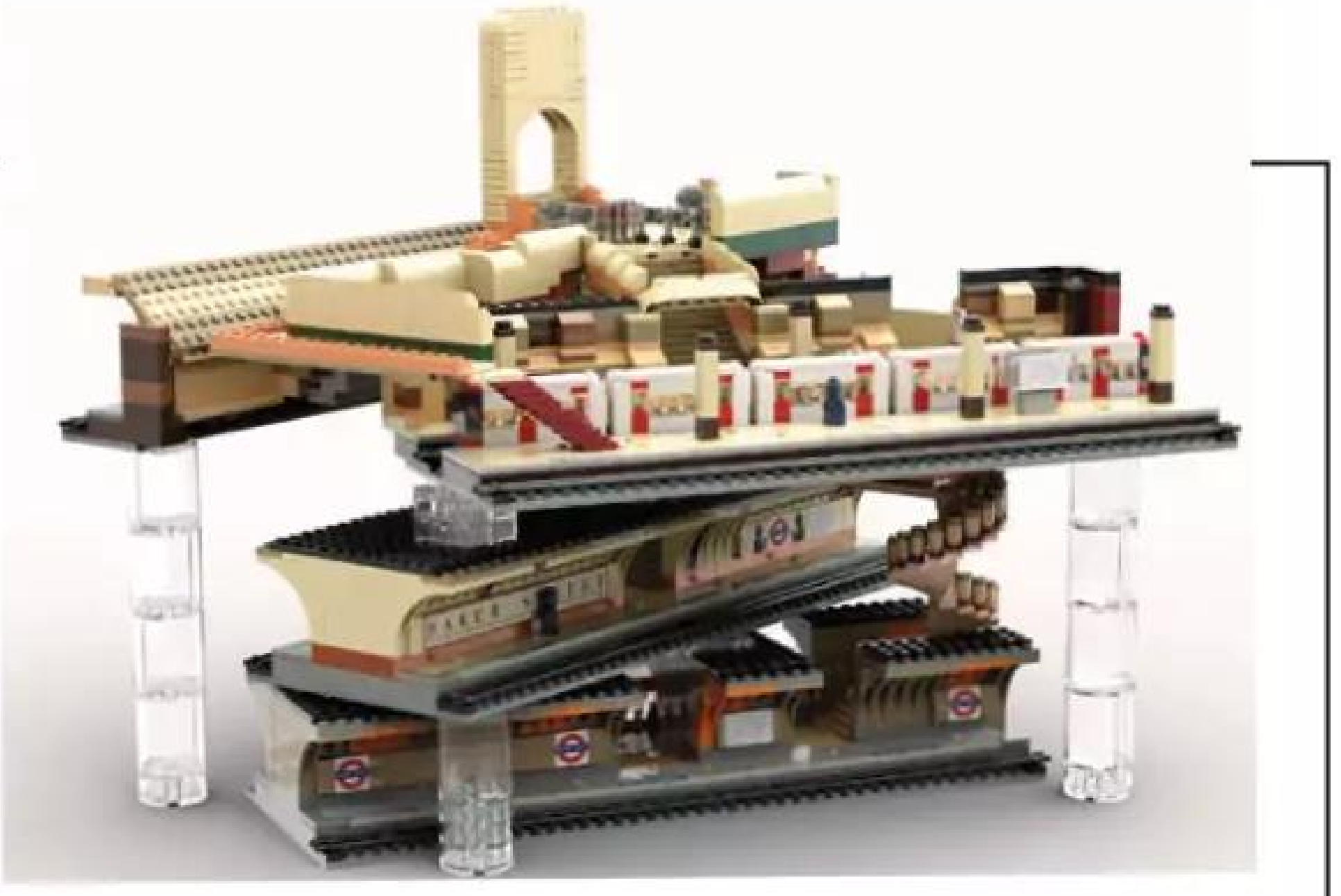
RYAN EVERLETH

Winning build



The A Night to Remember in The Shire challenge has announced its winner, with Brickcar13's Birthday With Old Friends taking home the top prize. The challenge tasked builders with envisioning the biggest and best Hobbit birthday party they could – and Brickcar13 delivered. The party is built atop an open book and framed with balloons and the night sky. The attendees are pretty much every famous Middle-Earth character you care to name — Smaug, the Balrog and Sauron are the main attention-grabbers there. And at the centre of it all is Bilbo, who's probably wondering why the trolls decided to show up.

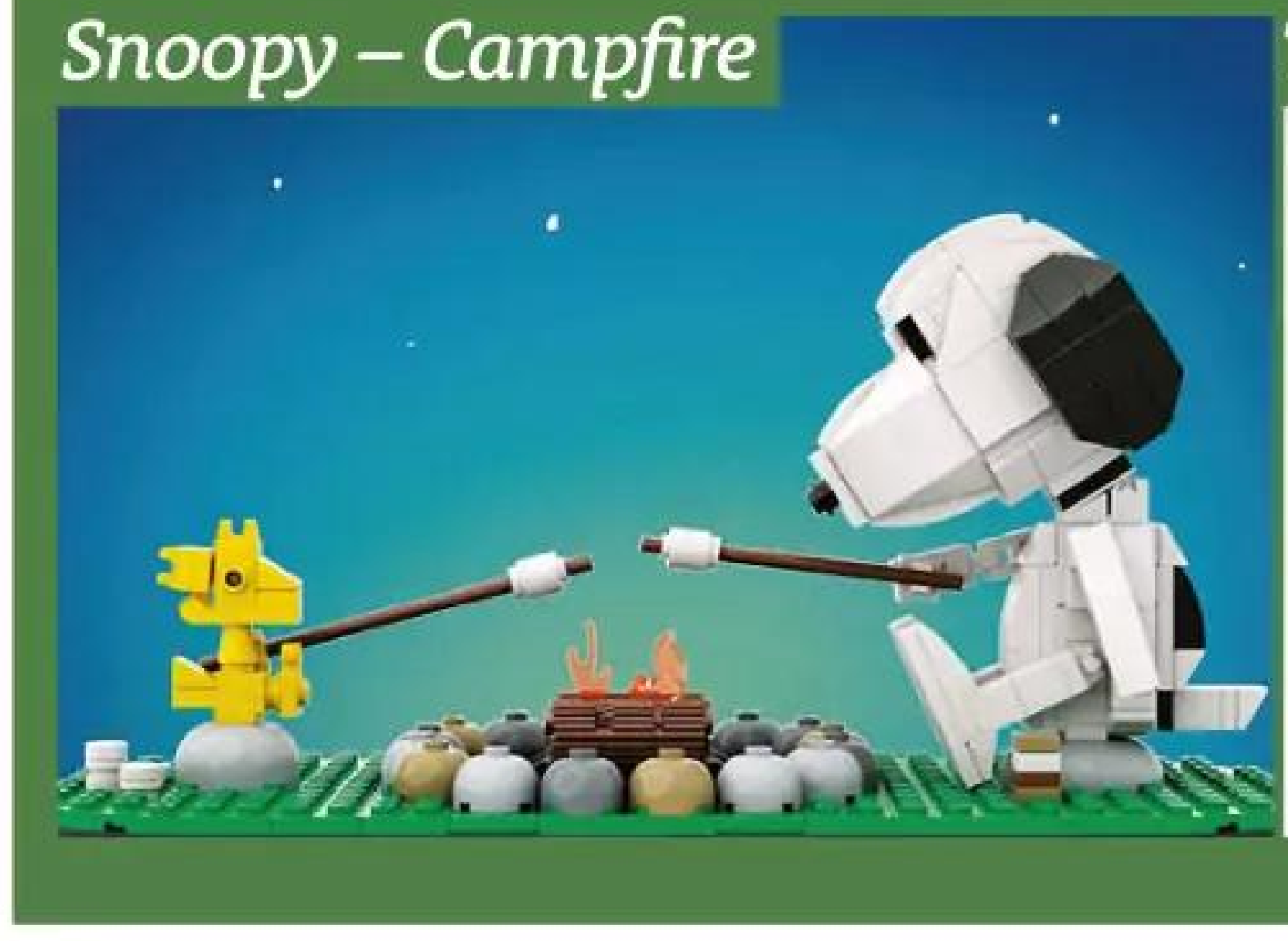
Gathering support



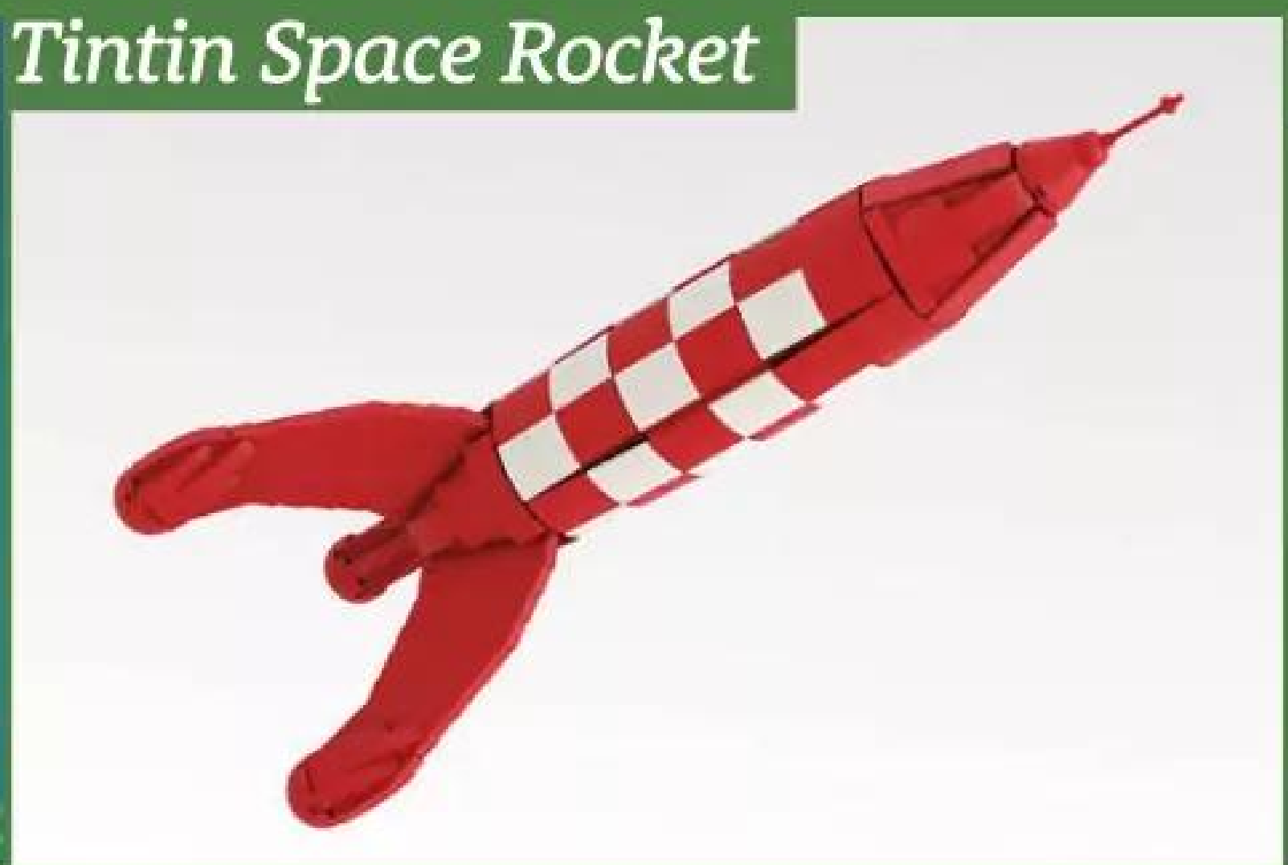
Few transit systems are as iconic as the London Underground. Dating to 1863, the tube has been zipping passengers across the city ever since. But for all its fame, the system has never been recreated in LEGO bricks. LEGO Ideas user PrincessJade hopes to change that with London Underground Baker Street Station. The micro scale build features the surface-level ticket hall and platforms for subsurface and deep-level lines. Two trains can roll up to the station, one designed for the subsurface lines and the other made for the deeper levels. Capturing all the platforms does make for a slightly splintering display, but the appreciation for the Underground is undeniable.

In the pipeline

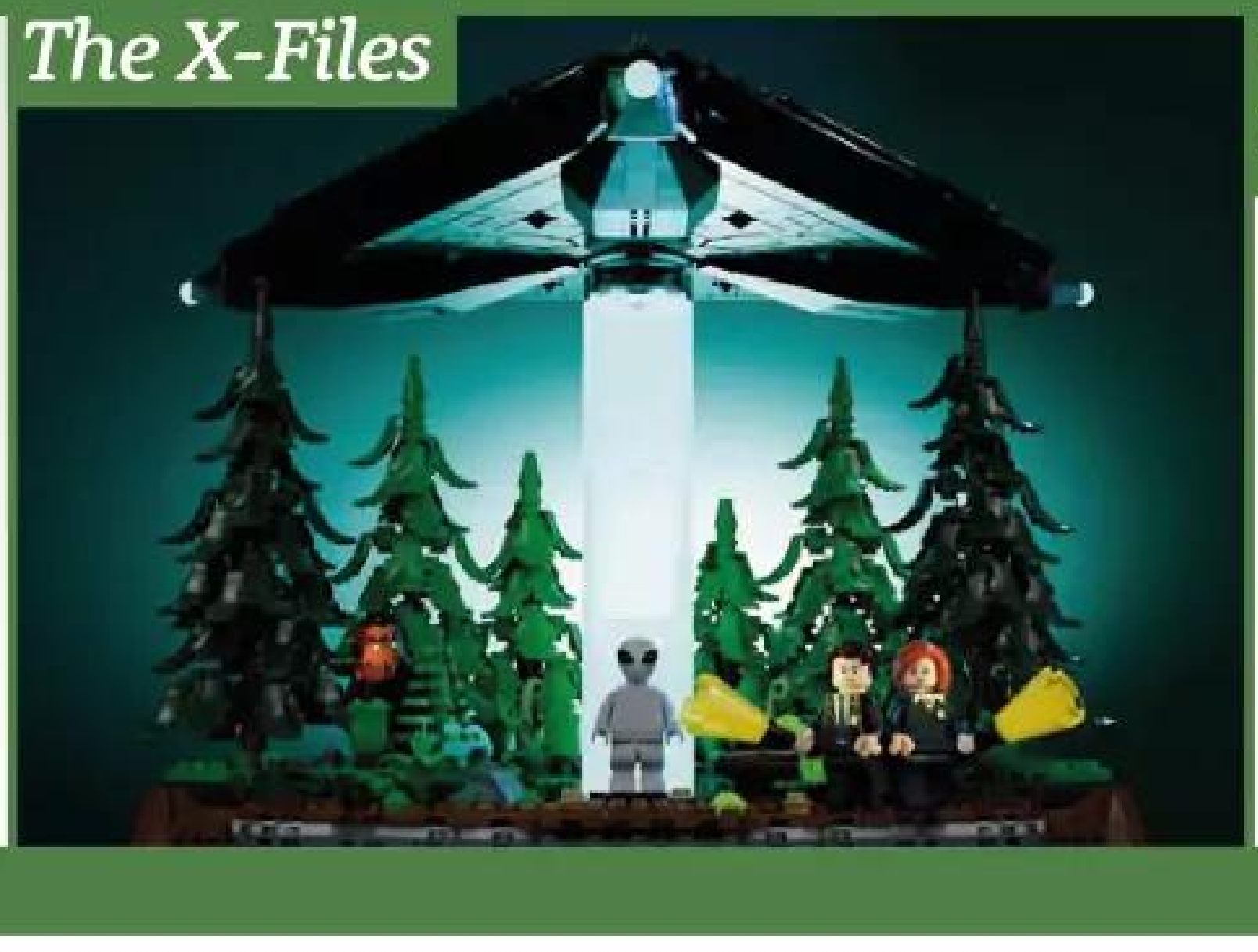
Snoopy – Campfire



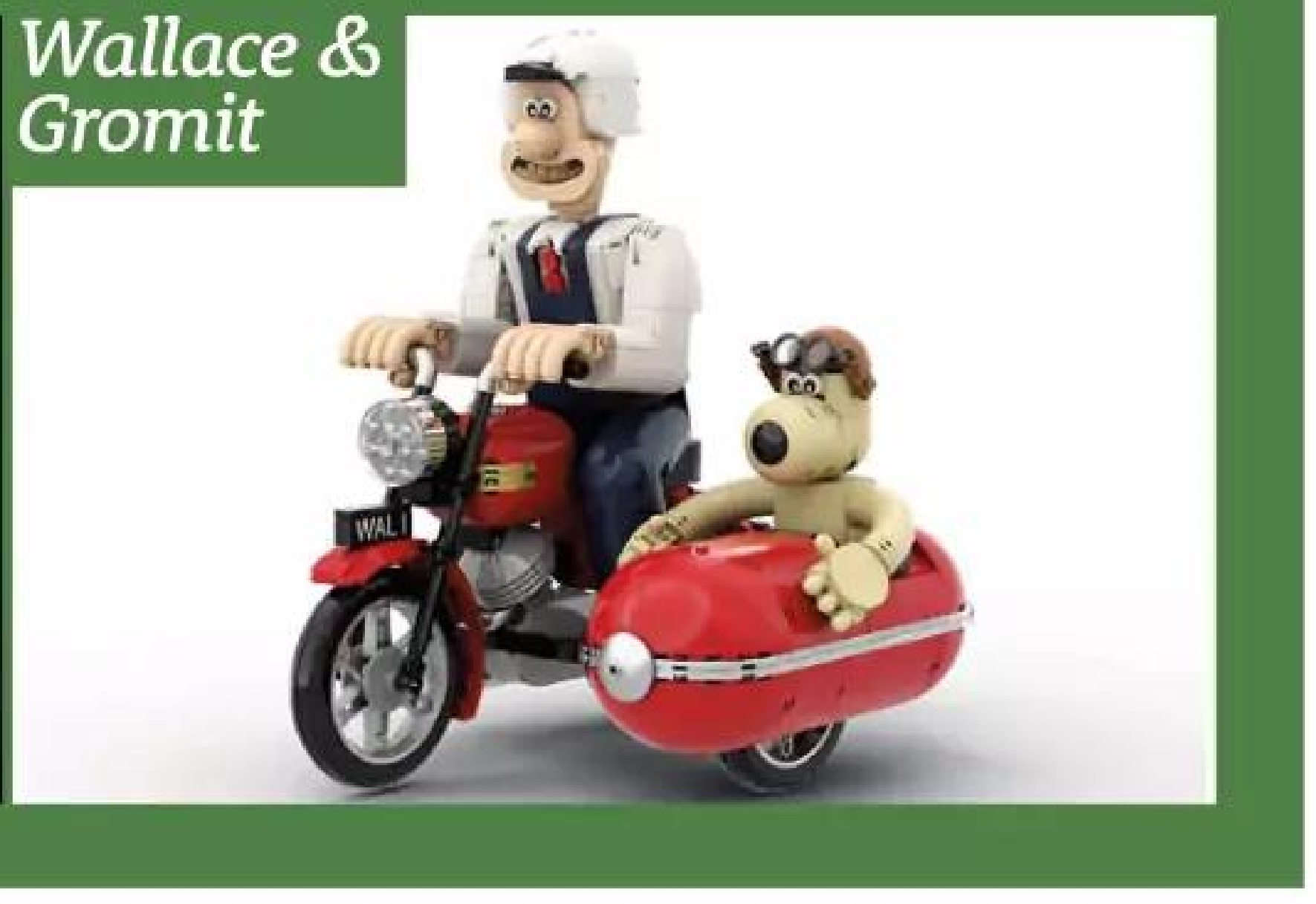
Tintin Space Rocket



The X-Files



Wallace & Gromit



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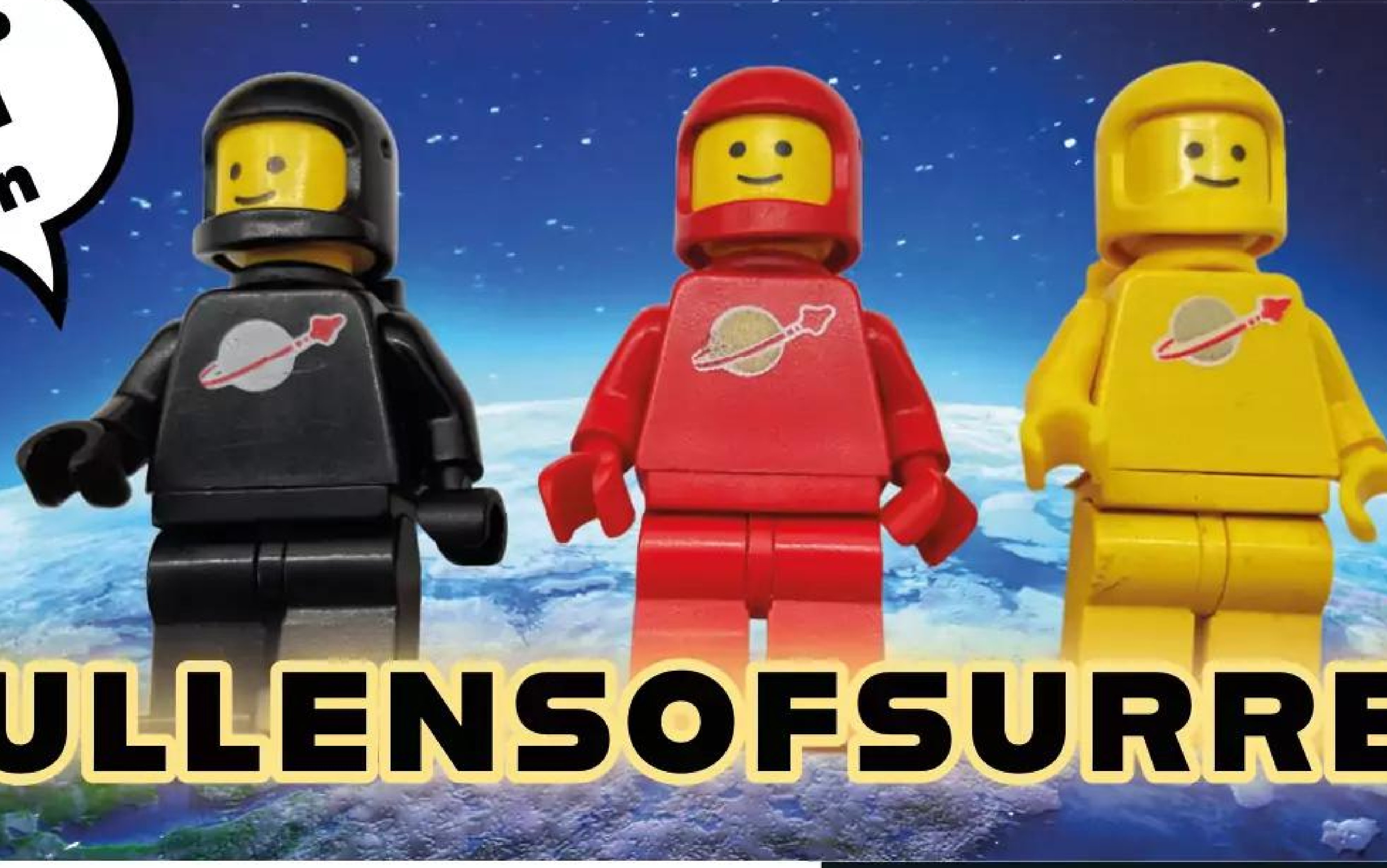

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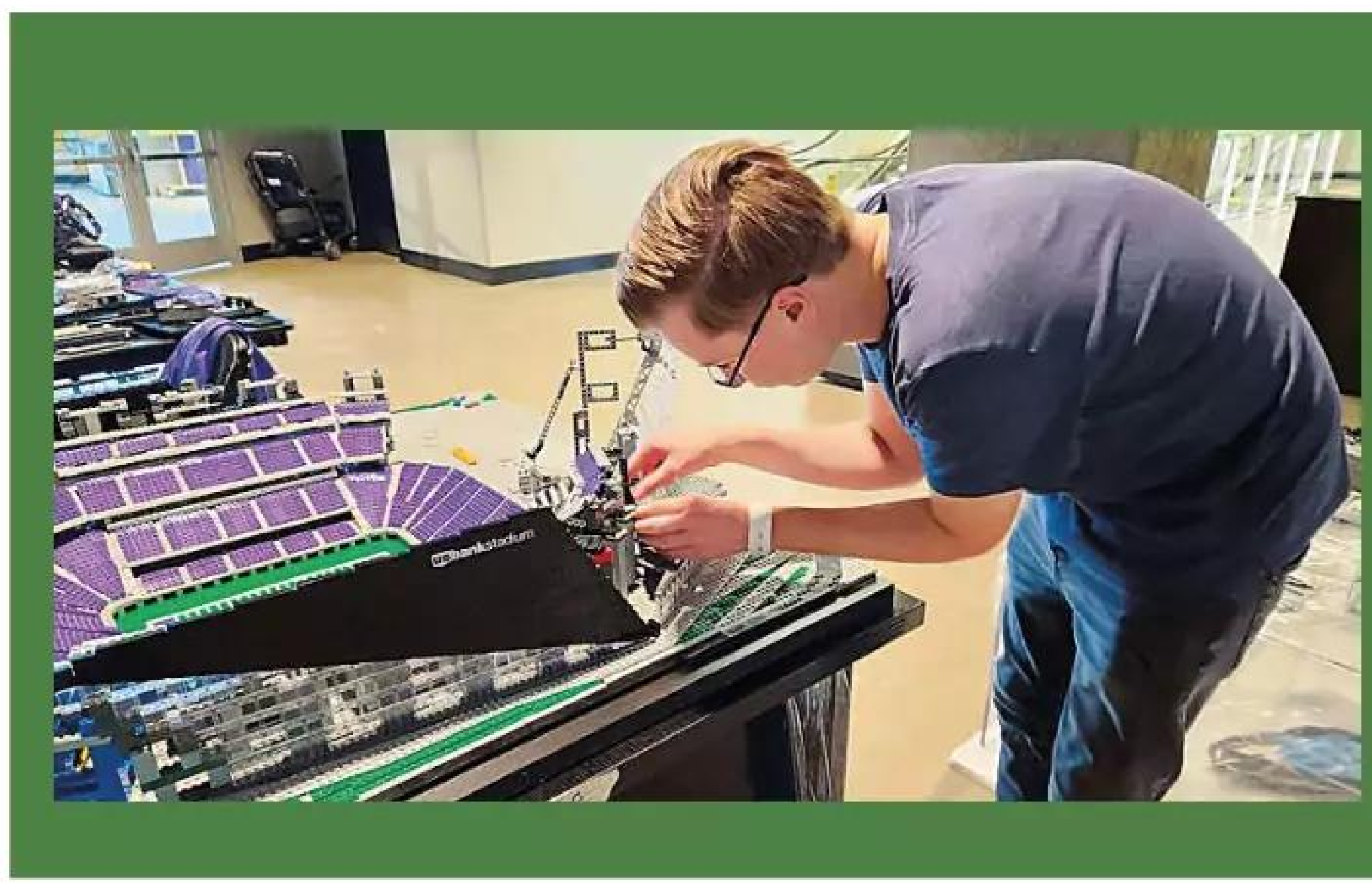
In other news...

Rounding up the rest of the month's news from the world of LEGO bricks

DISCOVERY CENTRES MOVING IN HOUSE

The LEGO Group is set to acquire all 29 LEGOLAND Discovery Centres globally from Merlin Entertainments, who owned and operated the Centres alongside LEGOLAND parks since their inception in 2007. Both the LEGO Group and Merlin Entertainments are holdings of the Kirk Kristiansen's larger investment firm, KIRKBI, so this isn't an earth-shattering shift, but it is at the very least an intriguing move given the traditional separation between the LEGO Group and LEGOLAND destinations. The sale will be finalised by the end of the year and is expected to have a cash consideration of £0.2 billion.



FAN PASSION RECOGNISED

Last month, lifelong Minnesota Vikings fan Camden Tatsapaugh completed his two-and-a-half-year project of recreating the Vikings' stadium in LEGO bricks, combing his biggest passions. And now his dream of seeing it displayed in the real Vikings stadium has come true; the team flew Camden out to Minnesota with his 15,000-piece replica in tow. After disassembling it into 125 sections for easier transport, Camden rebuilt the model once it arrived in the stadium, where it will sit on permanent display for other Vikings fans to marvel at the miniature recreation of their favourite team's home turf.

25 YEARS IN KLADNO

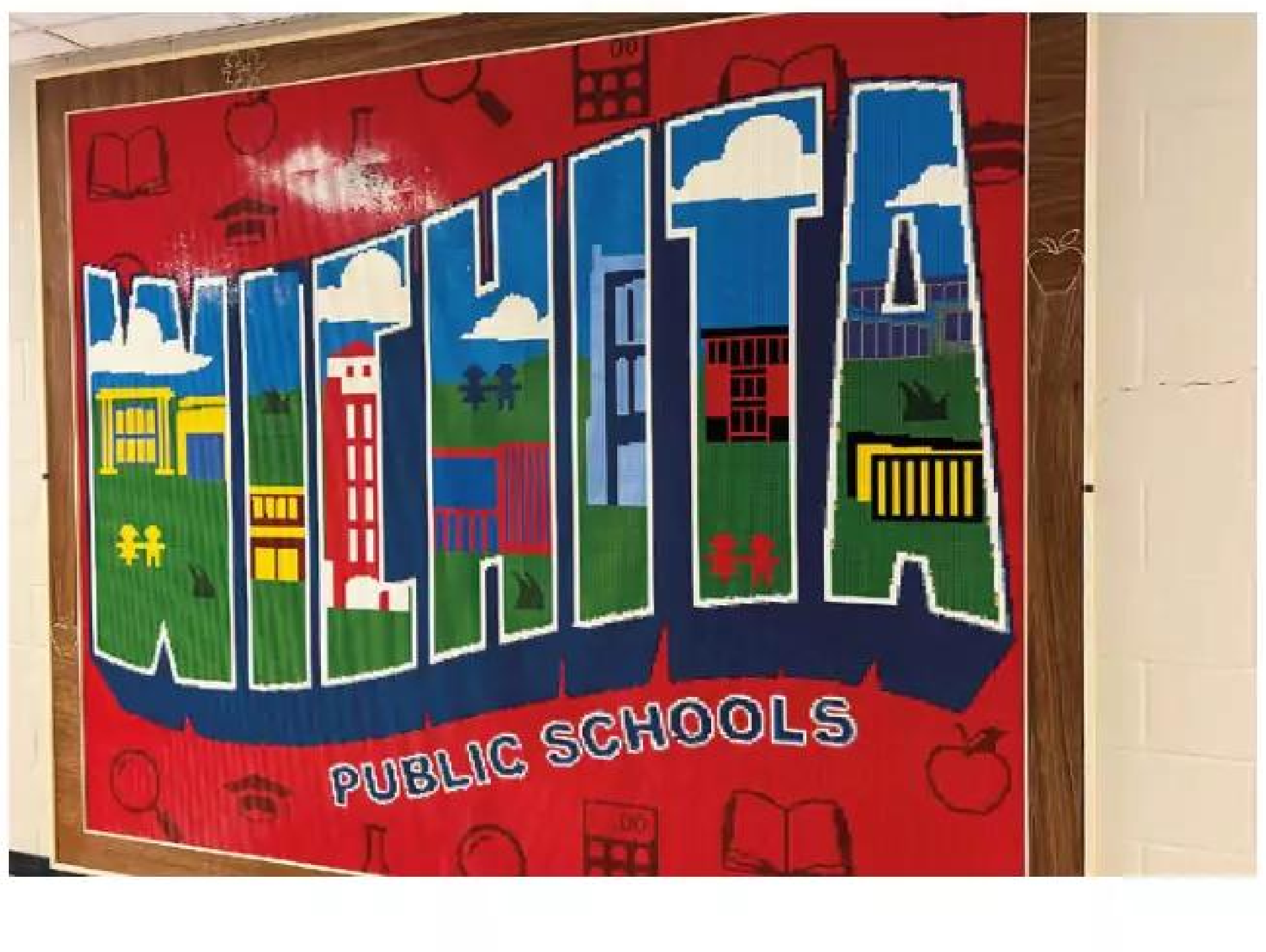
Originally opened in 2000 with just 80 employees, the LEGO Group's factory in Kladno, Czechia is celebrating its 25th anniversary with more than 3,300 colleagues. The 124,000 square metre site has grown to be a significant part of the LEGO Group's supply chain in the region, and the company celebrated its role in the local area with the unveiling of a 128,333-piece replica of the Czech royal crown in Prague alongside plenty of family activities. "This anniversary is an opportunity to celebrate the people who play a vital role in bringing LEGO play experiences to children and families," said Kladno Factory General Manager Michaela T. Horáková.

DELIVERING THE JOY OF CREATION
ONLY THE BEST IS GOOD ENOUGH
PLAYING OUR ROLE TOGETHER
JOY OF BUILDING, PRIDE OF CREATION
5D04
5D05
5D05
5D06

DISTRIBUTING BRICKS IN VIETNAM

Following the grand opening of a new LEGO factory in Vietnam earlier this year, the LEGO Group has opened a new regional distribution centre to help support its efforts to increase its presence in the region. The distribution centre will assist in supplying markets such as Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, Singapore and Japan, with more countries to be supported in the coming months. "Our new regional distribution centre in Dong Nai will play a critical role in supporting long-term growth in the region by creating a shorter and more agile supply chain," said LEGO APAC-China Supply Chain Operations Vice President P. Venkatram.

SHOWING LOCAL PRIDE



A district-wide collaboration of Wichita Public Schools in Wichita, Kansas, USA, has seen the creation of a giant LEGO brick mural showcasing schools from around the city. The mural consists of more than 100,000 LEGO bricks and is constructed from 99 individual sections, which were put together by groups at different schools all over the district. Those pieces were then gathered together and fitted to the full display, which was unveiled at a local gathering. The completed mural spells out Wichita in the style of a postcard, filling the letters with stylised scenes, and is now on display at the district's administrative centre.

RYAN EVERLETH

The Brick Debate

Were older sets really better?

Ryan says...

"When it comes to play sets, the likes of police stations and Turbo Tanks, there is something to be said for 'volume of stuff.'"

I'll cut right to the chase this time around – I am a firm believer that older LEGO sets have a leg up on modern ones.

I'm speaking mainly in reference to sets made in the late 2000s and early 2010s, an age rich with sets like 8098 Clone Turbo Tank and 7744 Police Headquarters. Since I have a habit of talking about Star Wars sets too much, let's use 7744 in comparison to 2025's set, 60316 Police Station.

7744 was a grail set of mine when I got into LEGO collecting at the ripe old age of six and it still is. I mean, look at the thing – 953 pieces with three stories wrapping around two sides of a baseplate, a two car garage, fences and a gate at the front. And all for £69.99 (£115 today)!

60316 Police Station maintains that £69.99 price, to its credit, but shrinks down to 668 pieces, a fair amount of which go into the base, which is no longer a baseplate. This leaves even fewer pieces for the station, which has shrunk to be a much smaller building with two fewer figures than 2008. Inflation obviously makes things hard to compare directly, but fact of the matter is, you're getting less police station in 2025 than in 2008.

Same goes for those Clone Turbo Tanks — 8098 in 2010 was £102.99 (£160 today) and 2025's 75413 Republic Juggernaut is £139.99 for significantly less Turbo Tank (1,141 pieces vs 813 with brick-built wheels). Again, inflation makes direct price comparison difficult, as the new set is technically cheaper, but not by much. And that small price difference yields a huge difference in the size of the set.

There's no denying that modern building techniques are much improved from 2010, for display sets in particular. But when it comes to play sets, the likes of police stations and Turbo Tanks, there is something to be said for the 'volume of stuff' that was had back then. Bigger is often better when a child is looking for a new toy and the LEGO sets of 2010 delivered in size without compromising on stability or aesthetics, generally speaking.

When evaluating LEGO sets in terms of their quality as toys, in terms of what a child would decide to play with if presented with both options, the LEGO sets from around 2010 are, in fact, better than what's on offer today.

RYAN EVERLETH

Kat says...

"LEGO themes have seen improvements because of technological progress, a bigger colour palette, greater piece availability and more advanced techniques."

Many LEGO fans, especially those who have been collectors for a while, will lament that older sets were better. It's stated with a nostalgic air for a supposedly golden renaissance of model designs and lower price tags. While the world was certainly more economically stable and things were cheaper, I don't think it's fair to say that older set designs are better.

Quickly perusing the older LEGO Friends sets reveals a plethora of gender stereotypes and an obsession with every shade of pink available. There were pink convertibles, cafés and bedrooms in the initial 2012 wave, which look uninspired compared to today's sets. The details and storytelling in 42670 Heartlake City Apartments & Stores are much better than the early sets.

Speaking of interiors, 60465 Air Ambulance is another great example of how newer sets are improved. As someone who grew up playing with LEGO City planes around 2006, although 7893 Passenger Plane looked impressive on the outside, it only had rows of seats for a grand total of one passenger. Seeing 60465 have a medical bay stocked with equipment and things for the minifigures to interact with makes my inner child jealous.

All of these evergreen LEGO themes have seen improvements in set design because of technological progress, a bigger colour palette, greater piece availability and more advanced techniques. This is especially noticeable for some of the longest running themes like LEGO Star Wars. Each Millennium Falcon design has improved upon the last, no matter the scale, and although the older designs offer nostalgia, they are nowhere near as detailed as the modern ones. I'm extremely happy that I have 75192 Millennium Falcon rather than its 2007 predecessor.

Yet maybe it's this repetition that is the true reason some fans claim to prefer older LEGO sets. It's far more challenging to be creative and innovative in themes that have a long history. There will continue to be rereleases and upgrades. It's why I enjoy focusing on the minutiae that demonstrates how a new set has improved upon the last, whether that is through new minifigures or a better colour match to a movie scene.

I would always rather wait for a new version of a model that is the best it can currently be, rather than settle for an outdated one from the past.

KAT REES-JAUKE

Top 10

Cute Trains

Blocks goes on a nostalgic journey through the most adorable brick engines

10. 43212 Disney Celebration Train

43212 Disney Celebration Train launched to tie in with the Disney 100 celebrations in 2023. This 4+ set's diminutive size doesn't hold it back from effectively presenting Disney film history, from Mickey and Minnie through to Moana, with nods to Peter Pan and Toy Story in between. The build is expectedly simple, using a base chassis plate for each car and then decorating it with an appropriately themed backdrop – Moana's is particularly striking, with its forced perspective and surfable wave.

9. 40166 LEGOLAND Train

For those visiting LEGOLAND theme parks, trains offer a pleasing and relaxing ride of the most traditional sort. This park-exclusive model seems to have been inspired by those found in the Deutschland and Malaysia parks, with the iconic yellow, green, red and blue colour scheme. The model is simple, as it only has a small locomotive and a passenger car, but it's sweet and sized at a souvenir friendly price. The four minifigures are clearly in for a fun adventure, and the model makes an ideal keepsake from a trip to a LEGOLAND park.

8. 40138 Christmas Train

Many of the trains later on this list are at minifigure scale, but this diminutive gift with purchase box from 2015 is not, yet it does a very good job with just 233 pieces. It is sweet in more ways than one, given the tender is filled with saccharine surprises and a white ice cream piece is placed on top of the chimney. The curved tops give it a nice cartoony feel. Gold is used sparingly throughout the model to add a few hints of decadence, but the accepted Christmas colours of red and green make it clear when this should be put on display.

7. 76423 Hogwarts Express and Hogsmeade Station

Travelling to Hogwarts on the Hogwarts Express is an essential part of most entries in the Harry Potter series and over the years there has been a series of models aiming to capture the train's magical power. Perhaps it's because 76423 is inspired by the end of Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone, when evil has been defeated and everyone is feeling happy, that it feels different to its predecessors. It's also at a somewhat smaller scale than what came before, so it can include two passenger cars and provide plenty of space for the minifigures to relax.

6. 40700 Winter Holiday Train

40700 continues the trend of impressively compact LEGO trains yet has a completely different feel to 40138. The red, green and gold colour scheme is very festive. Just in case it wasn't clear that this vehicle has a Christmas theme, the tender and wagon are stacked high with gifts and a spinning tree. It's the locomotive itself, however, that really shines, making excellent use of four flags for the cow catcher and the Monkie Kid cloud piece for smoke. A few gold leaf pieces add just an extra touch of class. This LEGO train is small but mighty.

5. 40370 LEGO Trains 40th Anniversary Set

The first LEGO train was 323 Train, which released in 1965, and in the 60 years since then trains have been a constant part of the LEGO portfolio. 40370 released in 2020 to celebrate 40 years since 7810 Push-Along Steam Engine. 1980 marked a new era for LEGO trains, including designs that were compatible with the then-new minifigures and a 12v motor. 40370 is an accurate recreation of 7810, however the chassis has been updated from a single piece to being brick built; that change aside, it's a fitting homage to the older set and generation, with lots of exposed studs capturing the look of legacy models.

4. 7597 Western Train Chase

Toy Story 3 begins with a high-octane Western movie inspired train chase (with an added spaceship, obviously) that Andy is playing out with his toys. 7597 could have come straight out of a child's imagination, with the engine using strong primary colours and the various cars providing plenty of opportunities for play. The minifigure cast is excellent too, including Woody, Buzz, Jessie, Rex and Evil Dr Pork Chop. The train is a little flimsy and the passenger car is empty, but it offers enough to go on a great adventure.

3. 10254 Winter Holiday Train

There is plenty of holiday cheer with 10254 Winter Holiday Train, the first train released as part of the Winter Village Collection. Like 40700, the colours are superb, with plenty of green, red and gold throughout and a few lights and wreaths that add further detail. One car is filled with microscale brick-built presents, the dream of any LEGO collector. The tree in the cargo car turns when the train moves and has a delightful microscale train around its base, strongly suggesting how builders might incorporate 10254 into their Christmas decorations at home.

2. 71437 The Bowser Express Train

71437 The Bowser Express Train has its own unique visual identity thanks to its subject matter – nowhere else would you see an engine shaped like Bowser's head. This model is complete fun from every angle – moving the engine causes smoke to rise from the chimney and Boom Boom's platform to spin around. The handcar winch also goes up and down. A pair of dressed up Goombas are having some snacks inside the passenger car and the cannon car is loaded and ready to fire. It includes a superb cast of characters, which round off a wholly unique train set.

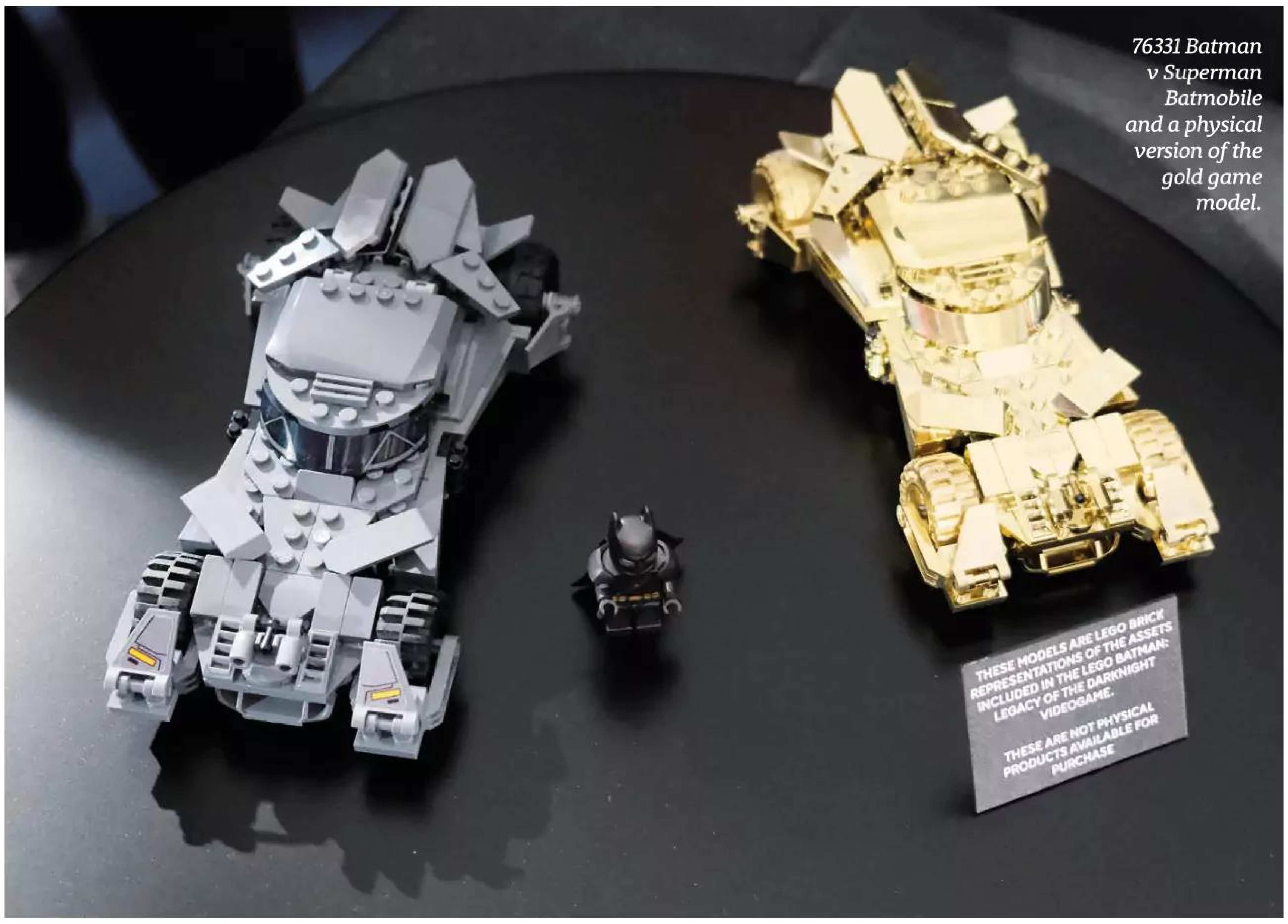
1. 71044 Disney Train and Station

Just like the trains at different LEGOLAND venues, the steam-powered train is an essential part of any trip to a Disney Park. The engines in Walt Disney World loop the Magic Kingdom, stopping at Main Street, Fantasyland and Frontierland. This LEGO version from 2019 is a beautiful steam train first and foremost, with some additional Disney branding. A similar red cowcatcher to the one in 7597 is present and the bulbous chimney adds some animated character. The predominantly red and black colour scheme is neatly punctuated with other hues, especially the gondola car's blue and white roof. This locomotive has all the charm needed to distinguish it as the cutest LEGO train so far.

ANTHONY WALKER-COOK

NEW BATMOBILE SETS ARE COMING INTO THE GAME

Three new Batmobile sets will unlock matching digital rides in LEGO Batman: Legacy of the Dark Knight


THESE MODELS ARE LEGO BRICK REPRESENTATIONS OF THE ASSETS INCLUDED IN THE LEGO BATMAN: LEGACY OF THE DARKNIGHT VIDEOGAME.
THESE ARE NOT PHYSICAL PRODUCTS AVAILABLE FOR PURCHASE

76331 Batman v Superman Batmobile and a physical version of the gold game model.

Next year will not only mark 20 years since Batman first arrived in the brick but will also see the release of LEGO Batman: Legacy of the Dark Knight. While LEGO video games are often inspired by physical products, it's unusual for there to be specific tie-in models. For this title though, specific models have been designed for both playing in game and as physical sets.

76331 Batman v Superman Batmobile, 76332 The Batman Batmobile and 76333 Batman & Robin Batmobile are coming next March. Each one is a minifigure scale vehicle and comes with a relevant Batman minifigure.

"If you buy one of these physical SKUs, there'll be a QR code in set that you can scan," says TT Games Executive Producer Matt Ellison. That will not only unlock the set you have purchased in game, but also a blinged out gold version. "That's the only way you'll be able to unlock these in game.

"Then if you buy all three of these sets and redeem all three in game, you will get an extra reward as well, a red brick that will basically put a gold effect around your character or your vehicle as you're playing through."

Each set will also include a special tile to mark 20 years since LEGO Batman launched. A fourth set will release alongside the cars – 76330 Batman Logo. It includes a special gold Batman minifigure to acknowledge the milestone.

GRAHAM E. HANCOCK

Graham's take

"It is exciting to see LEGO video games tie into the sets that inspire them."

It is exciting to finally see the creatives seize an opportunity to tie LEGO video games into the sets that inspire them. It's fair to say that it isn't always possible to do so – after all, the enormous capital ships in LEGO Star Wars: The Skywalker Saga would blow past the limits of the Ultimate Collector Series. No more though – now, synergy has arrived.

LEGO Batman: Legacy of the Dark Knight offers a really great opportunity – because you can ride around Gotham City in the Batmobile, the cars are scaled very closely to a minifigure. The designers have run with this concept and made a series of Speed Champions sized Batmobiles based on different versions of the Batman story. They promise that they will be a very close match to the versions they unlock on the game.

And that's the other way that the game lends itself to sets. Rather than being inspired by one version of the Batman lore, the new title will borrow from all of the different tellings of Bruce Wayne's story that have graced the screen through the years.

That means that you can choose the Batmobile you careen around in, which is perfect for a collectible series. As they are so similarly sized, they will look fantastic when lovingly lined up on a shelf.

Those with no intention of buying them might be a little miffed to miss out on the unlockable in-game Batmobiles, but the price of entry on the sets is low, so shouldn't prohibit too many players from getting the digital assets. The gold versions are a wonderfully fun touch.

As we get closer to the release of what promises to be an epic game I hope there will be more tie ins to actual LEGO sets so that the virtual brick world feels even closer to the tangible, physical one.

News in pictures

***Left:** Innovation Campus, the new building that will house the LEGO design team, is under construction in Billund.*

***Right:** Last year's best selling decorated element on LEGO.com Pick a Brick was the Wolfpack torso.*

What's new at bricklink

What is BDP?

BrickLink Designer Program is a way for fans to turn their builds into official LEGO sets. Each year, 15 fan-designed models will be available to pre-order as part of a very limited production run. Sets are limited to 30,000 copies per design.

FLEXIBLE STOCK FOR FUTURE BDP ROUNDS

A flexible approach to edition sizes kept sets in stock during Series 5 crowdfunding, so the strategy will stay in place going forward

BrickLink Designer Program has become renowned for fans battling it out whenever a new series launches, as they hurriedly place their order before the most popular sets sell out of their allocation.

With a maximum of 30,000 units available per design, there has been a supply and demand problem. With such a limited number of sets to cover the global market, the most popular designs have often sold out within hours.

"One of the challenges we've had is that a handful of models will sell out very quickly," says Head of BDP Alex Kastelic. "For the fans who are following along for a year and want a specific model, if a set sells out in three hours, they can no longer get the set."

To counter this issue, BrickLink introduced a new strategy for Series 5 – a flexible stock model. This method allocates the usual 30,000 units to each finalist available for preorder, but depending on demand for designs, units can be reallocated to the most popular sets.

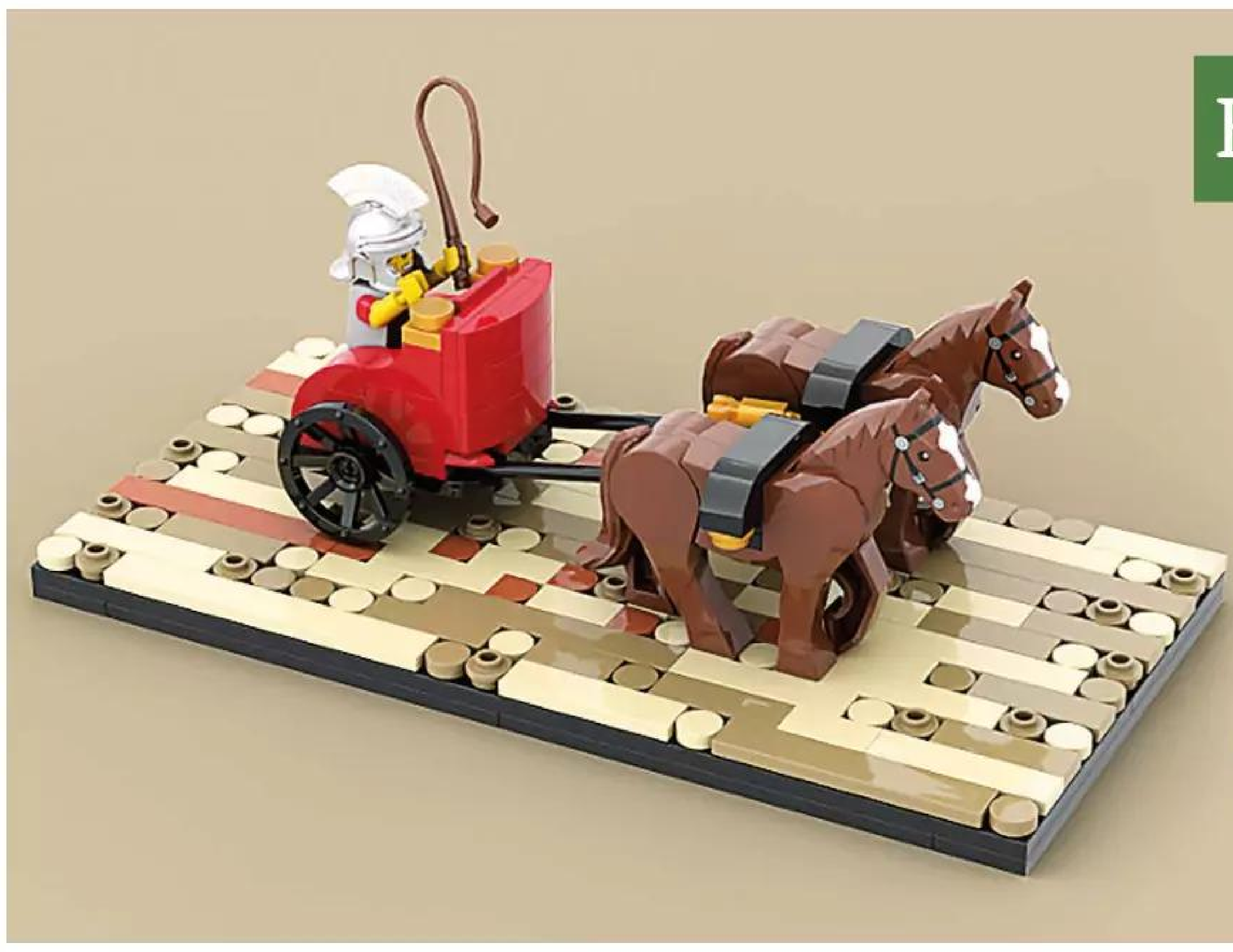
"What we can do is, for example, what you saw with [910049] Adventure in Transylvania," Alex explains. "We moved that up to 50,000 because we saw some of the other models weren't selling to that 30,000 mark. We guarantee that we will make 30,000 sets if a set sells that many. Each of the finalist models have the ability to sell up to 30,000 still, but that top cap of 50,000 is dependent totally on the performance of the other models."

It does not fully eliminate the risk of missing out, but all of the Series 5 sets were available for the entire preorder period. This approach is going to continue with future series.

"You could have a series where it's 30, 30, 30, all the way across," says Alex. "You could have one that's maybe going up to the limit of 50, three at 30 and one at 10. So whatever that that number is, and there's a little bit of flexibility in it, that kind of gives you an idea of what we're trying to do."

The progress bar (previously set to a total of 30,000) will disappear and then the final sales figures for each design will be reported at a later date. The preorder window for Series 6 has closed and Series 7 will be available in February 2026.

KAT REES-JAUKE



Build spotlight

Inspired by the history of Ancient Rome, gkoeberer has created a minifigure scaled chariot for gladiators to race in around arena. Brilliant SNOT techniques create the precariously open chariot and a worn section of sandy track, while two horses desperately race for the finish line. It's perfectly scaled for the Roman Commander from Collectible Minifigures Series 10.

Important dates

February 1, 2026
Series 7 open for preorder

March 2026
Series 6 sets start shipping

June 1, 2026
Series 8 open for preorder

July 2026
Series 7 sets start shipping

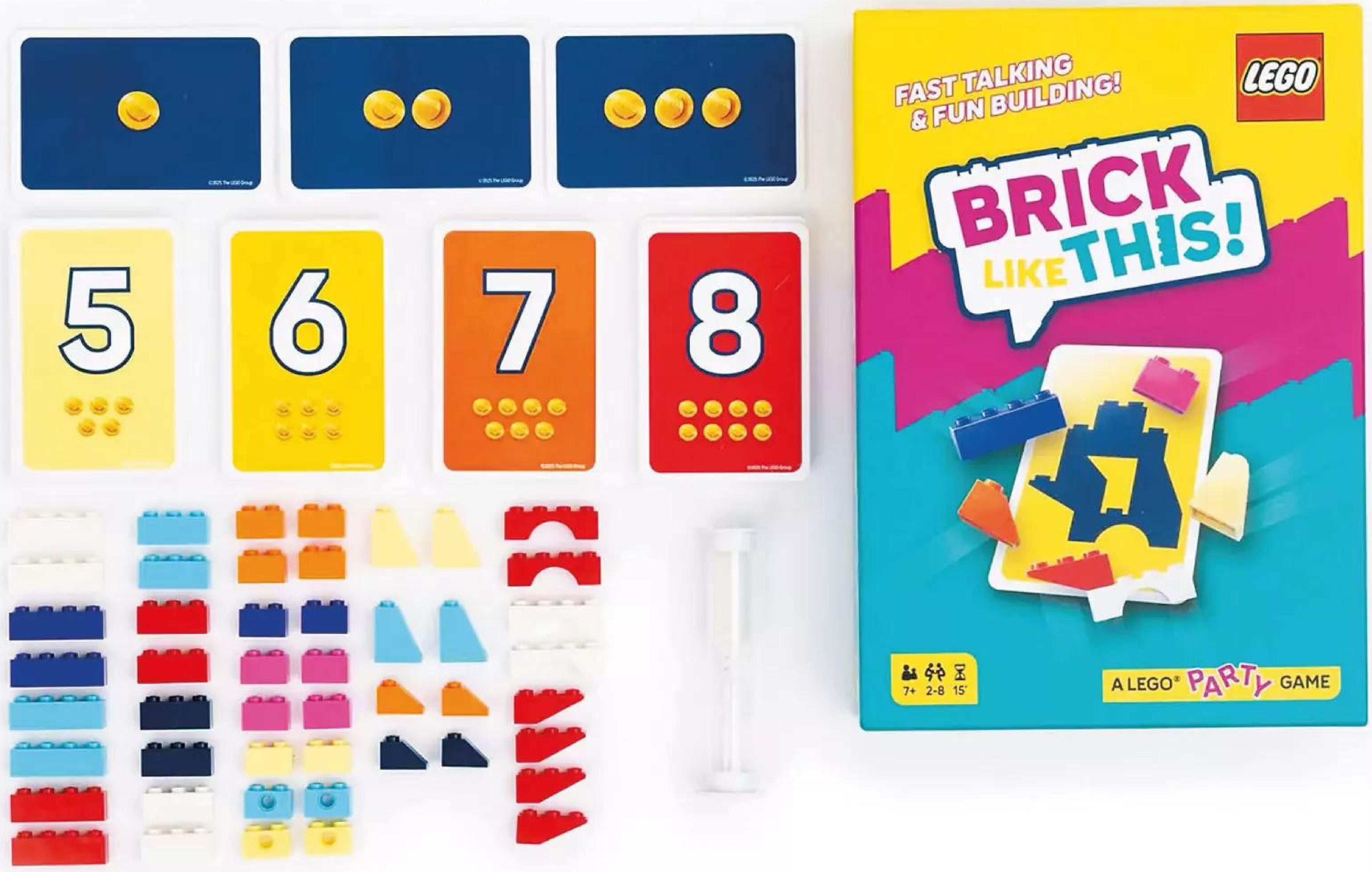
October 2026
Series 9 open for preorder

November 2026
Series 8 sets start shipping

Q&A

BRICK LIKE THIS!

Board game designer Luca Bellini reveals how he came up with Brick Like This!, the new LEGO game that packs a lot of fun into a small box



Sometimes, things come full circle. Luca Bellini was inspired by LEGO Games, a special board game theme that ran from 2009 until 2013, to create his own brick-based game. Last year, the LEGO Group and Asmodee launched their first game under the Dotted Games label. Monkey Palace is the first outcome from the two companies coming g together to bring their respective strengths together so see how the brick cam be embedded in games.

This year's follow up, Brick Like This!, has fewer rules and is intended for people who are not necessarily gaming aficionados – or even LEGO aficionados for that matter. There's little setup time, the game is played in fast rounds and it's easy to get to grips with.

Luca came up with the game more than a decade ago and created a play pattern where one person has to describe a pattern while their teammate builds it. That would be too simple of course, so he added the complication of challenge cards. These make it tougher to follow the instructions; perhaps the instructor can't speak, perhaps the builder can't use their thumbs.

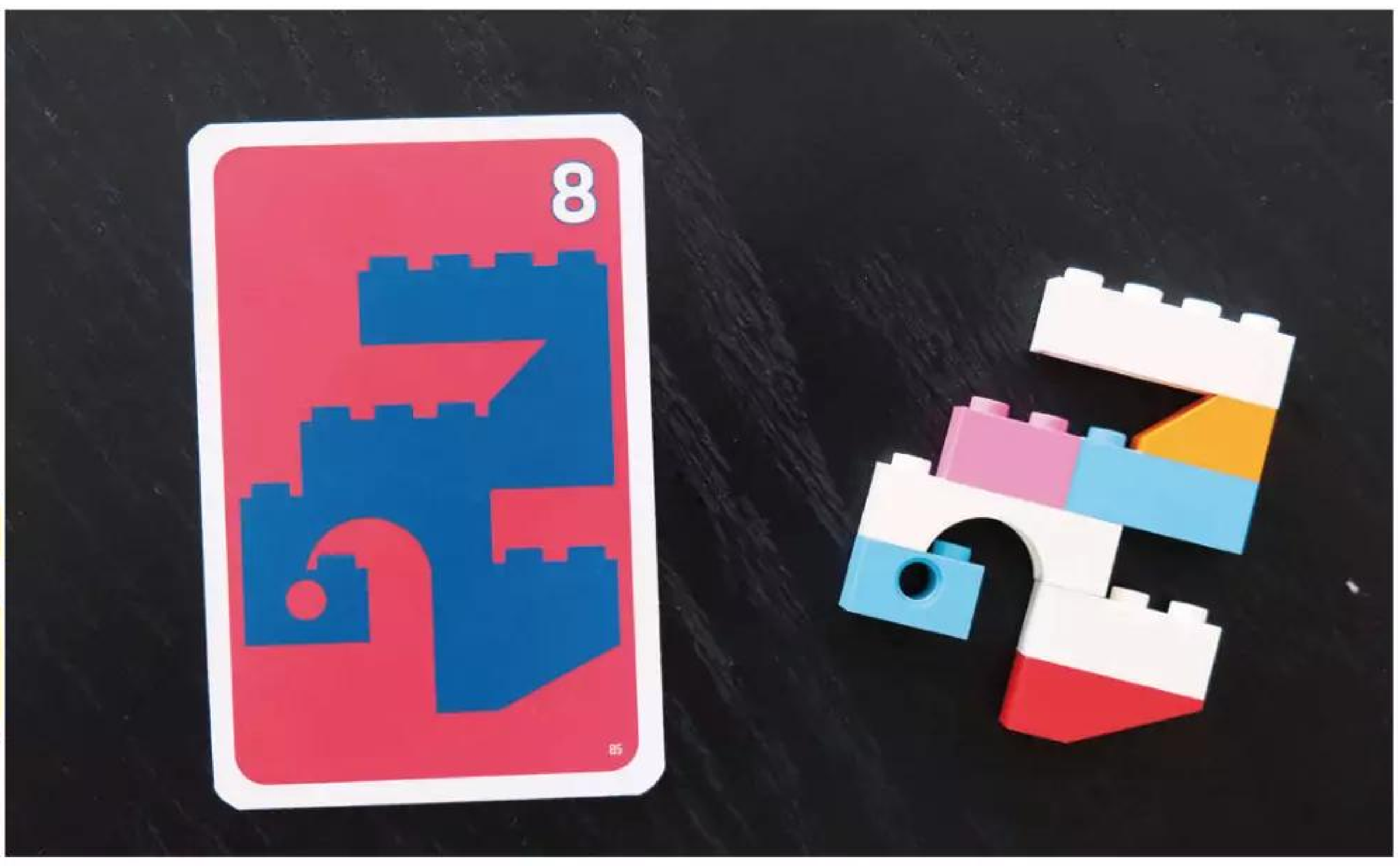
Teams are all building at the same time to see who finishes first – when one pair claims to have completed their card accurately, the 30 second timer flips and the rest of the teams must finish their builds before it runs out. Those who complete it each time and get it to match the pattern on the card get points. After a few rounds, the points are added up and the winning team gets bragging rights.

Blocks speaks to Luca to learn more about how the game was originally conceived and then developed for this release.

Blocks: What was the original inspiration for Brick Like This!?

Luca Bellini: The creative process that leads to the birth of a game is mysterious – as a game designer, you gather many inputs and, at a certain point, an idea begins to take shape in your mind, and you don't even really know where it came from.

I have always liked games where you have to do simple things that become more complicated due to the pressure of playing simultaneously with others. The original idea for Brick Like This! came about more than 10 years ago at a time when the LEGO Group had released a line of board games including Creationary and Champion, which were not just 'roll and move' games but used the elements in creative ways. My mind put all of these things together and gifted me the first inspirations, which I developed using the bricks I played with as a child and still had at home.



Build a Trophy
Build a trophy and dedicate it to someone you would like to celebrate – a true master.
LEGO
BRICK LIKE THIS!

__Left:__ Blocks collaborators Graham and Daniel test their communication skills with a game of Brick Like This!.

__Far left, top:__ Brick Like This! includes the cards and elements you need to play.

__Far left, bottom:__ The objective is to build the pattern on the card.

__Below:__ Luca Bellini designed the game.

How did you adapt your original game for this branded, official release?

Luca: At the beginning of 2022, I was contacted by the LEGO Group – they were working on a new project dedicated to board games and considered my old Brick Party perfectly in line with the concepts they wanted to explore… it was incredibly exciting.

This is to say that, in fact, the adaptation was minimal at the level of game design – the game mechanics were already solid. In collaboration with the Dotted Games team, we worked on small improvements, on increasing the number of challenge cards and on creating variants for two and three players, which were not originally part of it.

What was that process of deciding on the bricks that you would need for the game?

Luca: In the original Brick Party, the elements were not LEGO originals but from another manufacturer, with limited shapes and all two studs wide. When the development process for Brick Like This! began, the LEGO Group and Dotted Games decided to use single-thickness bricks to increase the variety of shapes available in the desired colours – and to make it easier to assemble and disassemble the shapes while playing. The specific selection of bricks and the shapes on the cards were defined by the Dotted Games team.

Do you test out the different challenges to see how people find them?

Luca: The challenge cards are the real 'boost' of the game and, together with Dotted Games, we worked to have a large number of them, ensuring maximum replayability and giving players the chance to experience many small adventures. We tested all of the challenges ourselves to make sure they worked and to set a difficulty ranking that determined their point value.

Often, the fun starts when you explain what the challenge is and how it will be played – it's wonderful to see those emotions spark even before the actual game experience begins.

Do you have any tips for people to succeed at the game?

Luca: I know that many people reading this article are already familiar with LEGO bricks and it's important to note that they might have a slight advantage in the game thanks to their ability to recognise the elements by name and the dexterity they've developed over the years. When playing with newcomers, it's a good idea to mix up the teams so everyone has a similar skill level.

Beyond that, I believe Brick Like This! can bring fun to everyone, regardless of whether or not they are LEGO enthusiasts.

FAST TALKING & FUN BUILDING!
BRICK LIKE THIS!
LEGO
A LEGO

The Lost Elements

Blocks delves into the many elements and products that the LEGO Group has designed but never released

MONORAIL COUPLING SYSTEM

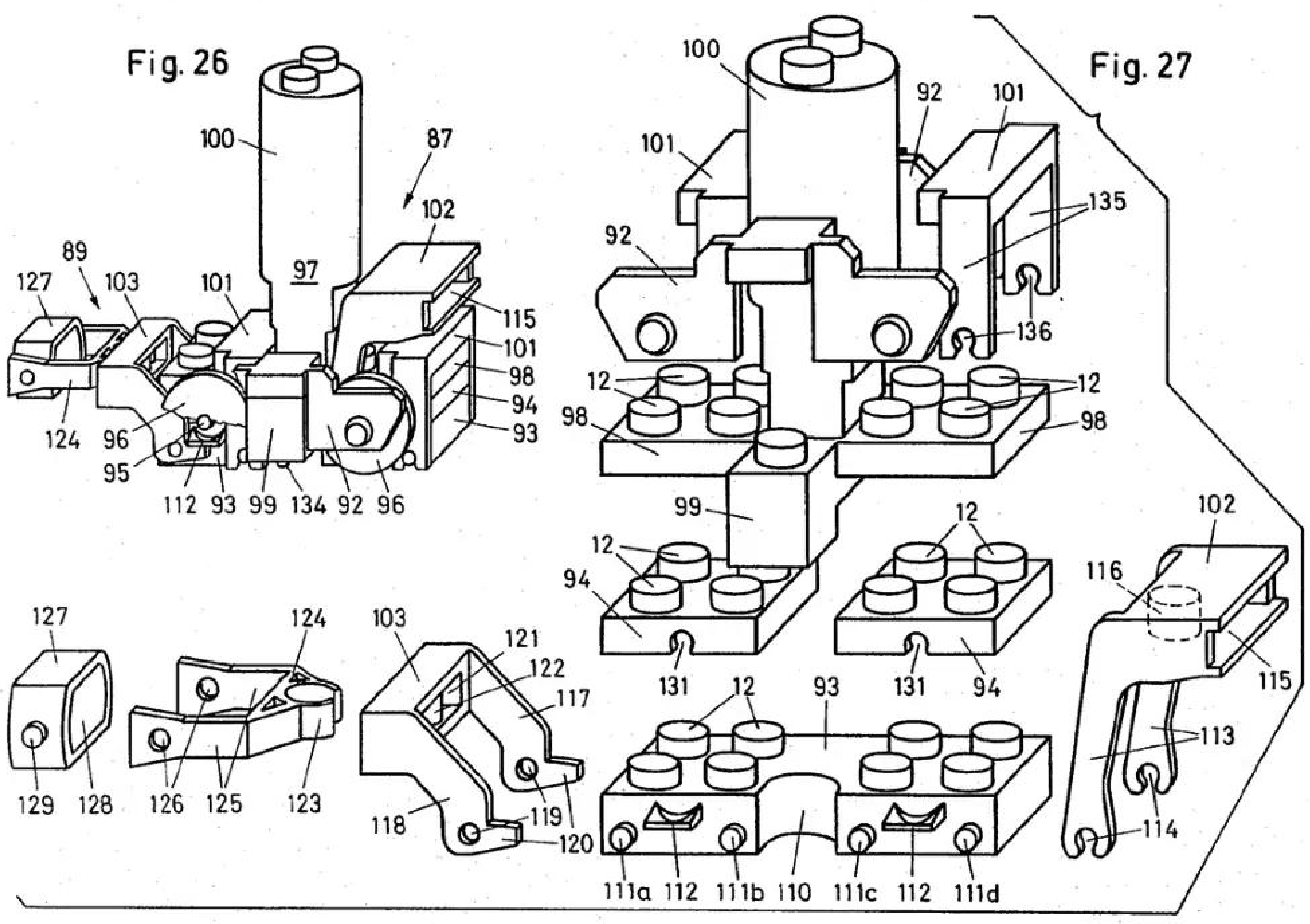
The trio of LEGO monorail sets from the 1980s and 1990s wowed an entire generation of children. Despite a healthy system of track, trains and motors that were actually released, the LEGO Group had much bolder plans for concept. One such expansion would have taken the monorail cars and made them much more like a traditional LEGO train with magnetic couplings.

All three of the monorail sets that were released include cars that connect to each other and the motor chassis using a slot and insert system. These connectors hold everything together while still allowing for the rotation necessary to make it around bends.

However, this was not the only methodology considered and prototyped. Designers had big dreams for monorail systems, envisioning raised track systems weaving in and out of city streets or futuristic space settlements, with whole lines of cars. It would have made sense to use methodology from the long-established LEGO Trains theme in this context, which is why the designers explored magnetic couplings for monorails as well.

The design for these couplings closely mirrored that of trains from the same period in the late 1980s. One element would attach via small pins to a base, allowing for vertical rotation. A second part would have clipped into it and allowed for horizontal rotation. That final piece would have held the magnet to also rotate in the vertical direction. These various joints would have offered a fair amount of flexibility.

Ultimately, the production of monorails proved to be too expensive and the concept was discontinued. Had it enjoyed more success, perhaps this and many other innovations would have eventually made it into boxes.



The entire coupling system that was considered.

LEGO DIMENSIONS VARIANT

Dimensions was the LEGO Group's foray into the toys-to-life genre back in 2015. It included a startling number of characters and vehicles, which you would build and would then come to life in the game.

Each one was identified using a special round baseplate, called a functional brick, which contained information that a reader pad could decode. Each character and vehicle was unique and had a specific functional brick. Designers came up with elements that would have featured two functional bricks.

The idea was that these parts would allow for additional gameplay options where characters or vehicles could have multiple forms onscreen. A potential application would have been similar to dynamaxing in Pokémon. For example, when one functional brick is in contact with the reader, a character might appear in their normal state, but when the player decides to unleash a special ability, they would physically flip down the second brick so it would be in contact with the reader pad as well.

Two physical elements were conceived to illustrate the concept – a bridge and a shell. Each of these would be identifiable in either a single or dual detection state as they would have had two functional bricks. The game would have responded by allowing players to cross a bridge or access the interior of a clam based on the physical orientation of these elements.

It is clear from this and other concepts that the LEGO Group had a lot of plans for expanding Dimensions had it been more successful. Ultimately, all of these ideas were scrapped when the title was cancelled in 2017, just two years after its debut. Parts such as this were developed but never manufactured.

DANIEL KONSTANSKI

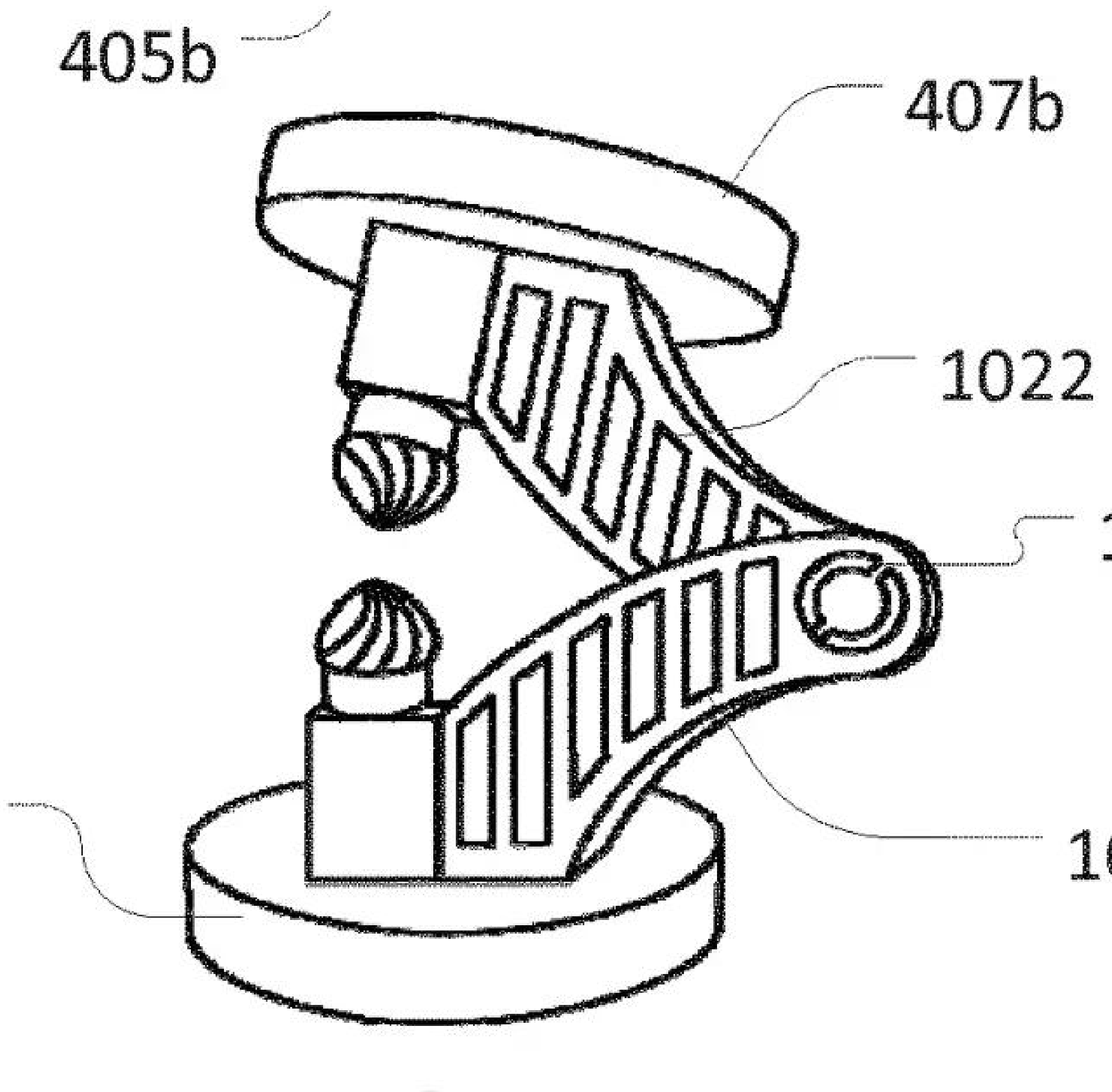


FIG. 10B

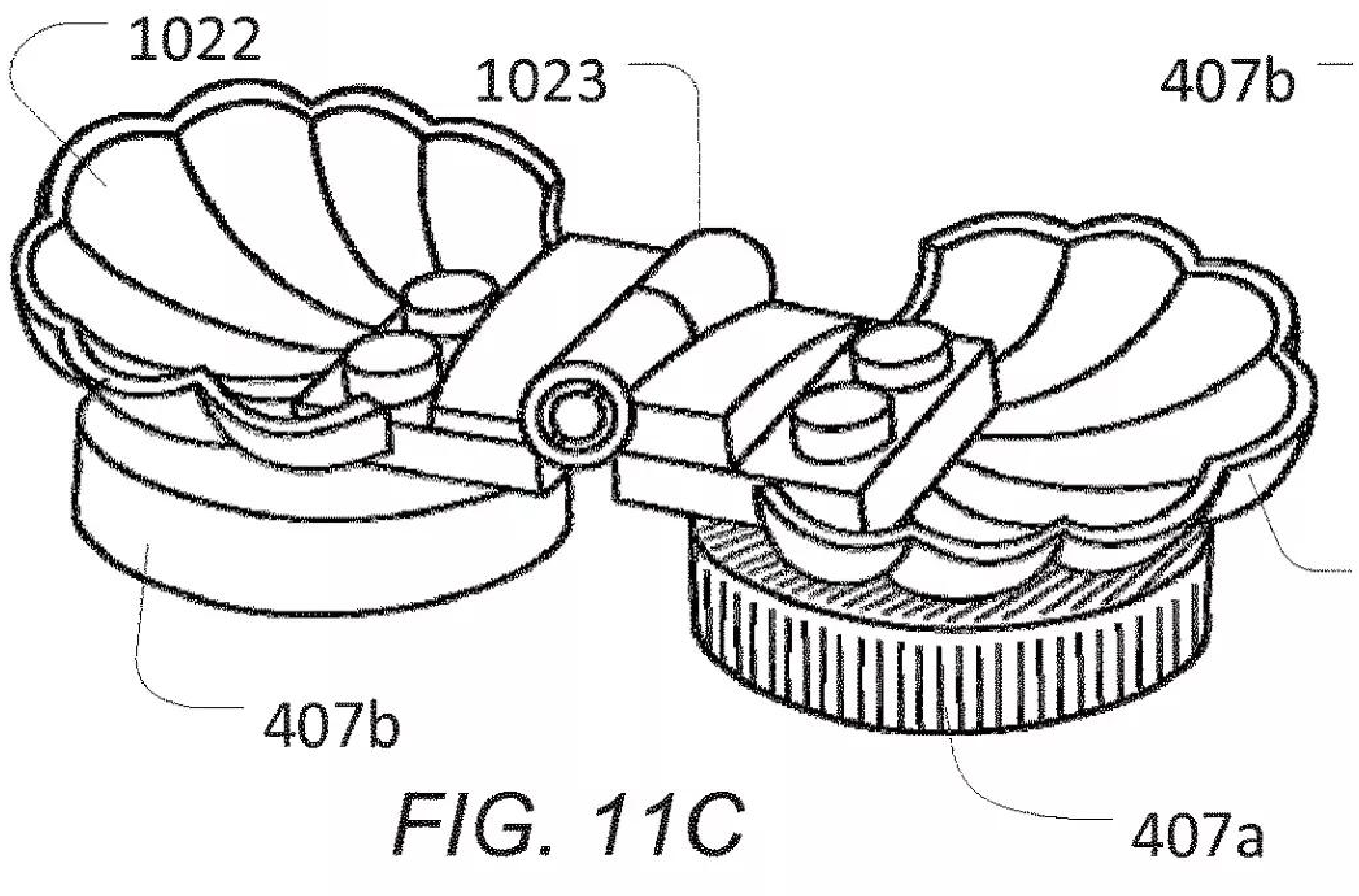


FIG. 11C

***Left:** The Dimensions variants with pivoting hinges would have allowed multiple points of contact with the reader.*

***Right:** Two functional bricks would have touched the base using this element.*

Five things we've learned this month...

1

MORE PLAY COMING TO VIRGINIA

As the LEGO Group prepares to open a new factory in Virginia, USA, the company has taken to supporting local nonprofits to help provide more play opportunities to local children. Currently, six nonprofits have the support of grants that will help them reach 400,000 children with various programs designed to encourage play. "Thanks to the LEGO Group, SOAR365 has been able to respond to the growing need for Paediatric Therapy service in Central Virginia, increasing the number of children we serve to 1,200 — a 40% increase in just two years," said John Walker, President and CEO of SOAR365, one of the organisations supported by the grants.

NIKE COLLAB CONTINUES

The LEGO Group and Nike's collaboration kicked off this past summer and is showing no signs of slowing down any time soon. The partnership always intended to feature athletes from around the world, and women's basketball star A'ja Wilson is the latest to get involved. A'ja received a LEGO minifigure transformation in an animated short promoting "Clicked In," a new mini show about A'ja. Her minifigure counterpart is likely to remain just a digital host, but A'ja's role in the show is a fun new direction for the LEGO Group and Nike's partnership, adding a bit of personal touch to the effort.

2

3

STAR TREK IS TAKING OFF

Fans have long considered LEGO Star Trek a pipe dream, mostly due to the existence of LEGO Star Wars and Star Trek appearances in other brick-based brands. But this far-off dream will soon become a reality, as the LEGO Group has teased Star Trek with a Jean-Luc Picard minifigure, seemingly hinting towards at least one set based on The Next Generation television series. Modern trends suggest that Star Trek will join the LEGO Icons portfolio rather than start as a fully-fledged theme, but with details sparse for now, the potential for either route is there.

TOM HOLLAND WON'T STOP PLAYING

Tom Holland has teamed up with the LEGO Group for a new brand video titled 'Never Stop Playing.' The bright and chaotic video features all sorts of wacky characters played by Holland, all of whom declare their love of play and a desire to never stop playing. "I loved building with LEGO bricks as a child," Holland said. "It was fun to relive those memories on set. Becoming an official 'Playmaker' is very cool. No matter how busy life gets, I've never stopped playing... and I don't plan to anytime soon!" You can find the video on the Blocks YouTube channel.

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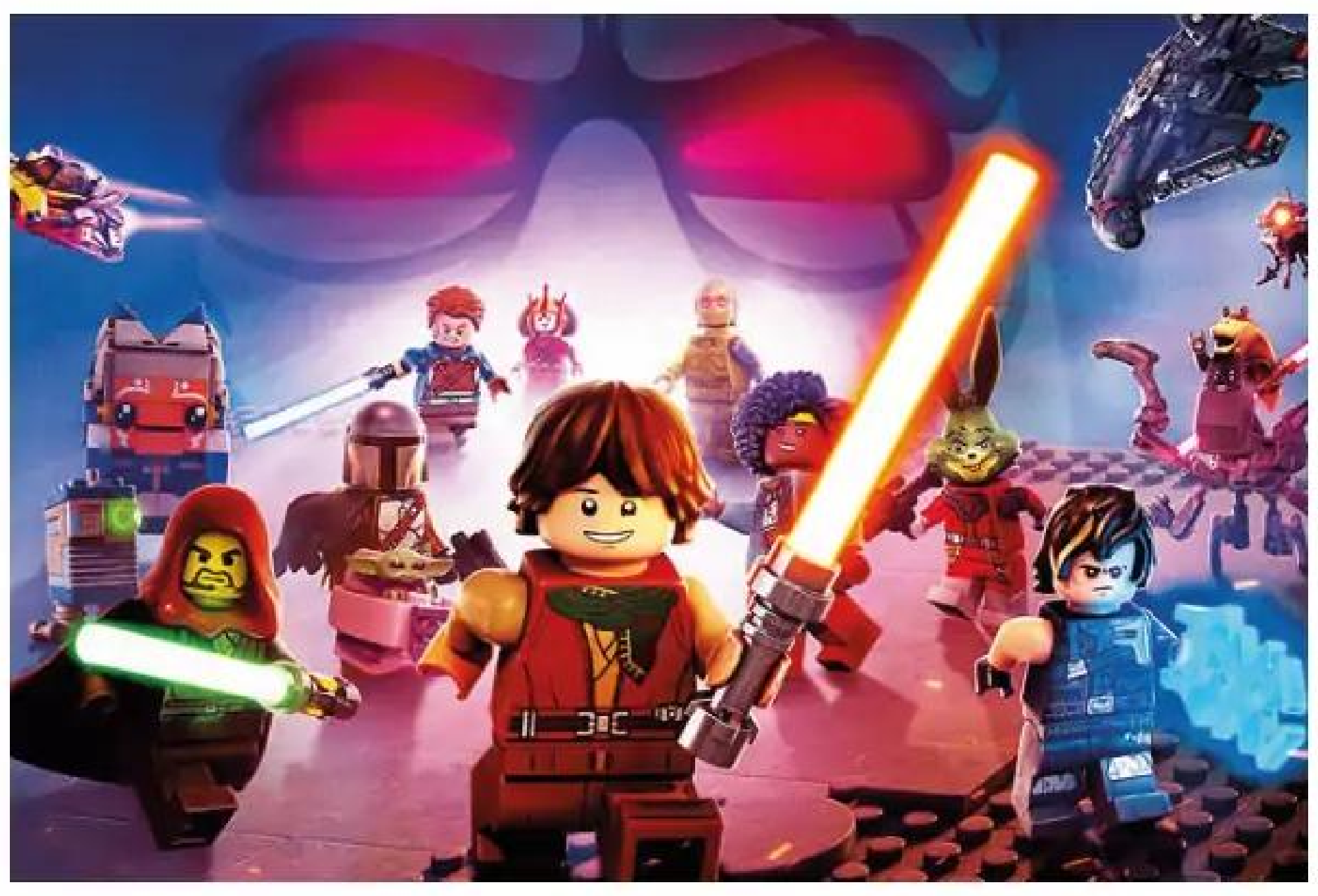

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LUCASFILM LOVES LEGO STAR WARS

With a wildly successful partnership that's more than 25 years strong, it should be no surprise that Lucasfilm is a fan of LEGO Star Wars. But Lucasfilm Senior Vice President of Franchise Content and Strategy James Waugh recently opened up about one aspect that makes LEGO bricks the perfect match for the galaxy far, far away: "LEGO Star Wars has its own sense of humour, it's own style and creates a special opportunity to share something you love with your kids no matter the age." That unique style is something that was channelled in Rebuild the Galaxy, which has a second season on Disney+ now.

RYAN EVERLETH

This LEGO Life

A CATLYST FOR CURIOSITY

After building some of the Lunar New Year models, Kat reflects on how accurate cultural portrayal in LEGO sets encourages learning and satisifies a diverse fanbase

> *"My knowledge about Chinese culture was relatively limited, so I had a great time learning during the build and then going on to research things afterwards."*

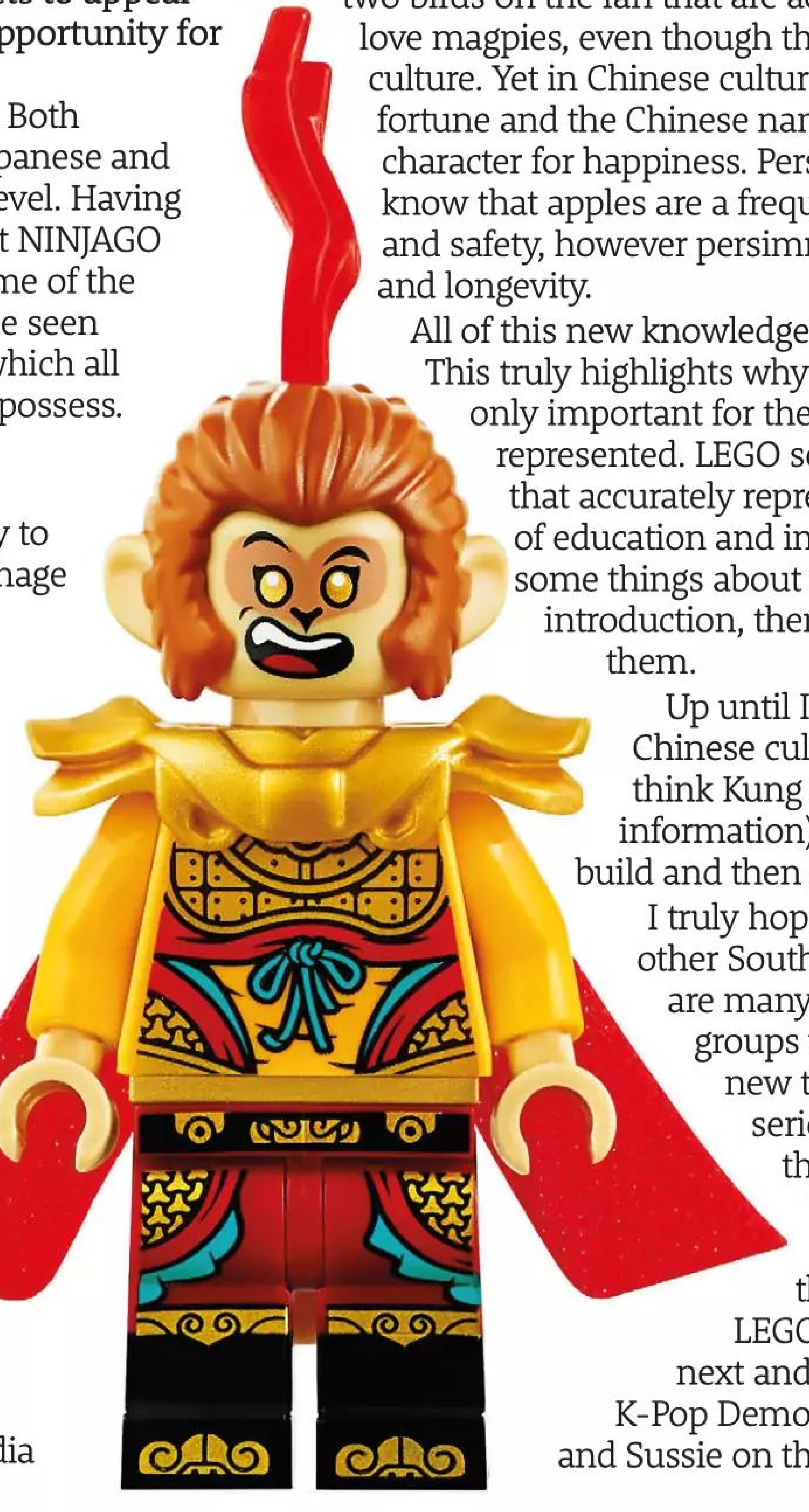
In the recent LEGO Store sale I picked up some of the 2025 Lunar New Year sets. While the festival has long since passed and we're well into the Year of the Snake, I still wanted to add these beautiful sets to my collection. Yet one of the main reasons I wanted these sets – 80116 Trotting Lantern and 80117 Good Fortune – is because they are filled with details authentic to Lunar New Year traditions and especially Chinese culture. As LEGO designers craft sets to appeal more to the Southeast Asian toy market, it's a good opportunity for authentic representation.

So far the representation has been superficial at best. Both NINJAGO and Monkie Kid are apparently inspired by Japanese and Chinese cultures respectively, but only on a very basic level. Having ninja, a few torii gates and sushi restaurants throughout NINJAGO models does not make it Japanese and simply picks some of the best-known elements from that culture. This can also be seen through the dragons that are part of the current wave, which all have wings, something traditional Japanese ryū do not possess. It's a westernised approach to a Japanese aesthetic.

Unfortunately, the exact same thing happened with Monkie Kid. The original tale from China, called Journey to the West, focuses on a dramatised version of the pilgrimage of Buddhist monk Xuanzang who travels to India in search of sacred scriptures. It adds fictional elements and Chinese mythology via the main character, Sun Wukong, a monkey who is born from a stone egg and learns the secrets of Tao – the art of shapeshifting, combat and immortality. It's a far cry from the food trucks and jets in the LEGO theme.

That context is why I was so fascinated when building the Lunar New Year models. They truly were a catalyst for curiosity. Both capture elements of the mythology, significance and customs surrounding this festival and I learned a lot. Although I was aware of the Chinese zodiac and its 13 animals, I didn't realise that they were further subdivided into the five elements – earth, metal, wood, water and fire. This year is specifically the Year of the Wood Snake, which is associated with creativity and wisdom.

Another aspect of the trotting lantern is its light brick which can project a scene in the shadow puppet theatre. While shadow puppetry features in a lot of media associated with stories set in China, I knew relatively little else about it. Did I know that its origins trace back 1,000 years? Absolutely not. Or that the puppets of the characters were typically painted based on Chinese opera make-up? That was new to me as well. In fact it led me down a rabbit hole reading Chinese history blogs for several hours.



I had the exact same experience with 80117 Good Fortune. There are two birds on the fan that are actually oriental magpies. I absolutely love magpies, even though they are considered ill omens in Western culture. Yet in Chinese culture they are actually symbols of good fortune and the Chinese name for magpie even incorporates the character for happiness. Persimmons are another positive omen. I did know that apples are a frequent gift in China as they represent peace and safety, however persimmons are also gifted as symbols of luck and longevity.

All of this new knowledge came about because I built these sets. This truly highlights why authentic cultural representation isn't only important for the LEGO fans of the countries being represented. LEGO sets are a way to learn and having models that accurately represent a culture makes them a great source of education and information. Whether you already know some things about these cultures or these sets are your first introduction, there's so much that can be gleaned from them.

Up until I built these sets, my knowledge of Chinese culture was relatively limited (I don't think Kung Fu Panda filled me with authentic information), so I had a great time learning during the build and then going on to research things afterwards.

I truly hope the LEGO designers continue to explore other Southeast Asian cultures accurately, as there are many anime, manga, K-dramas and K-pop groups that would be perfect to transform into new themes or perhaps Collectible Minifigures series. If the brand truly wants to tap into the toy market of Southeast Asia, then these are the stories and icons that could authentically represent the diversity of these different countries. I'm hoping the LEGO Group may be inspired to go to Korea next and would love to have sets inspired by K-Pop Demon Hunters. Who wouldn't want Derpy and Sussie on their desk?

LEGO
9+
80116
Trotting Lantern
1295 pcs
LEGO
9+
80117
Good Fortune
1021 pcs

Far left, top: *Kat scored these Lunar New Year sets in the sale*

Left: *2025 is the Year of the Snake.*

Far left, bottom: *The LEGO Group has taken inspiration from the Monkey King.*

Below: *Kat did a deep dive into Chinese culture.*

Holiday Express Train

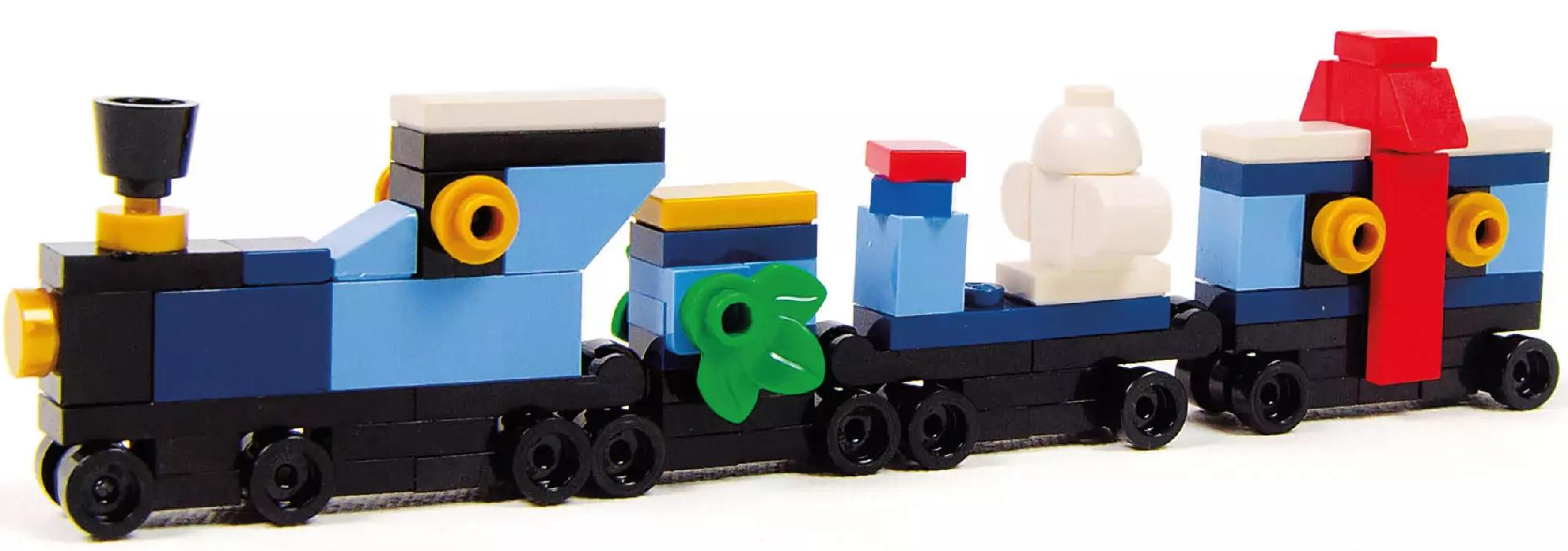
Depict the ideal of travelling through the snowy expanse at a miniature scale with this charming winter locomotive

Steam engines are a staple of traditional holiday displays, so 10361 Holiday Express Train should make a charming addition to your festive decor. To celebrate this new model, this small version captures the warmth and charm in a form that is even more accessible, compact and displayable.

Building the train at such a small scale requires inventive part usage to suggest key details without cluttering the tiny build. The locomotive's smokestack and headlight are emphasised, while erling bricks stand in for small windows. Capturing the polar bear at this scale is especially tricky and requires the use of new double curved elements. Couplers between cars are functional and minimal, preserving the flow of the train while avoiding bulk.

This build naturally inspires more additions. Extra train cars, whether a dining car, a toy workshop or Santa's sleigh mounted on rails would fit seamlessly. Beyond the train itself, you could build an entire Winter Village for the engine to travel through.

DANIEL KONSTANSKI



Get the parts list: blocksmag.com/goto/holiday-express

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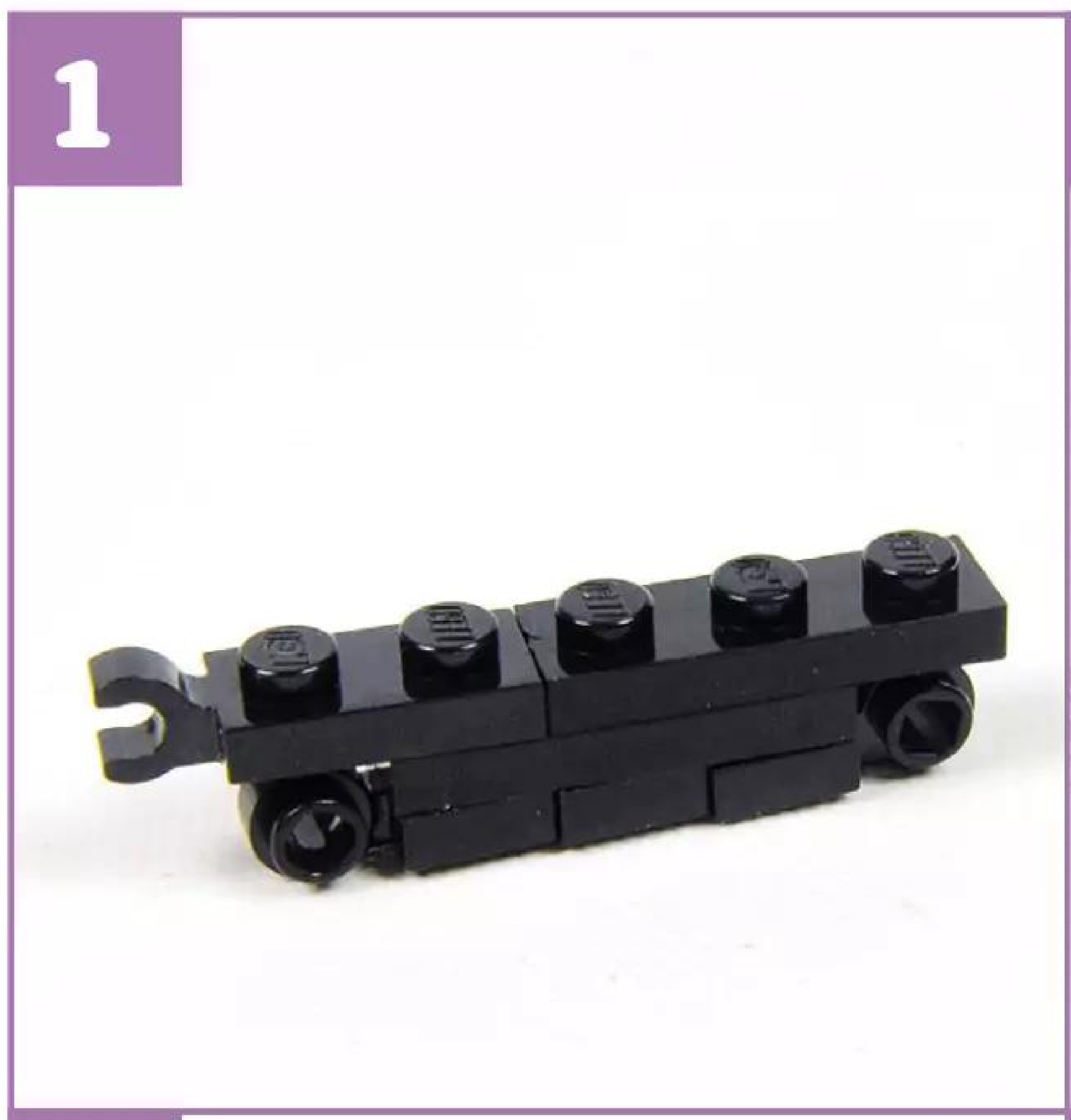

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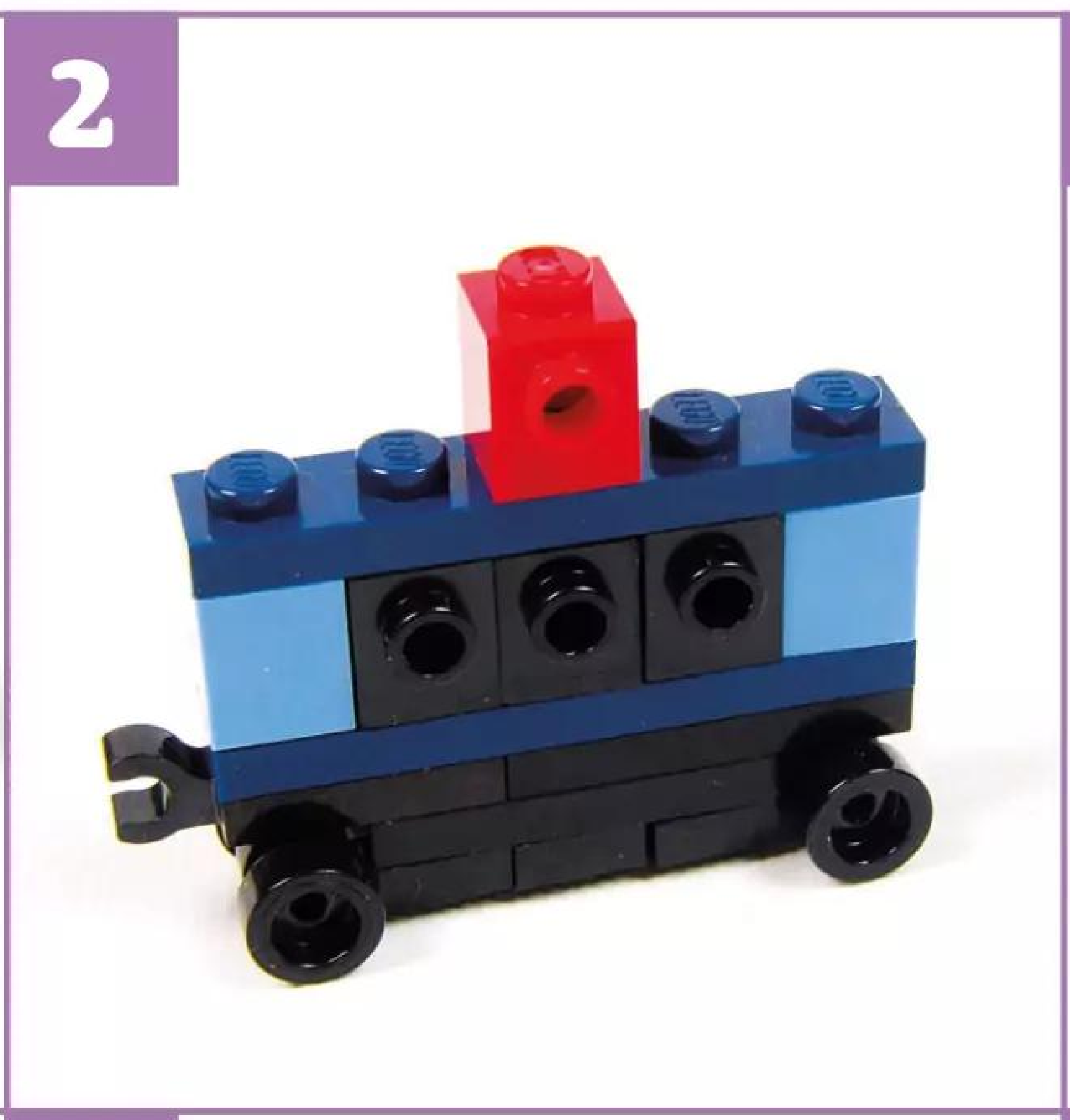

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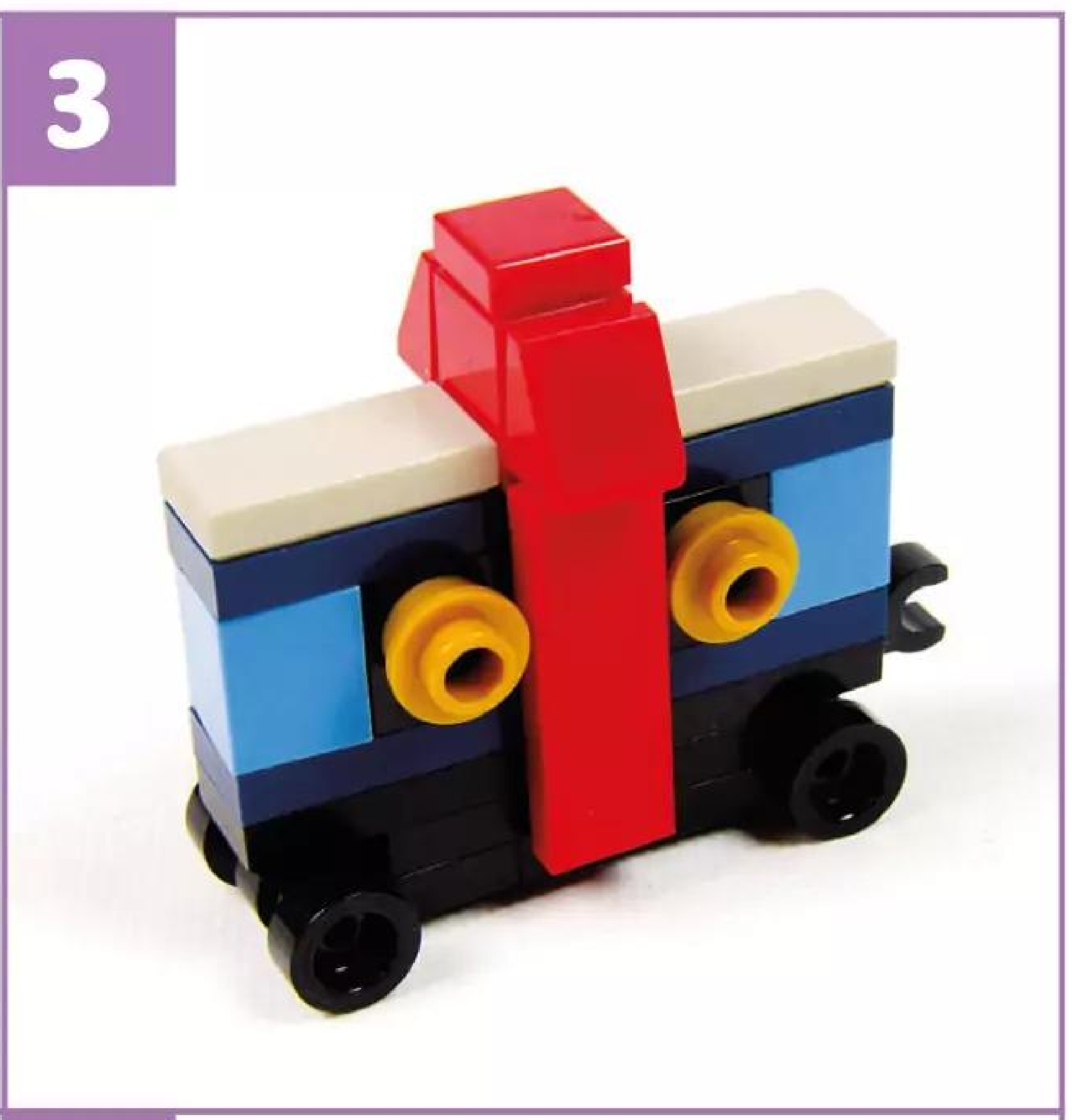

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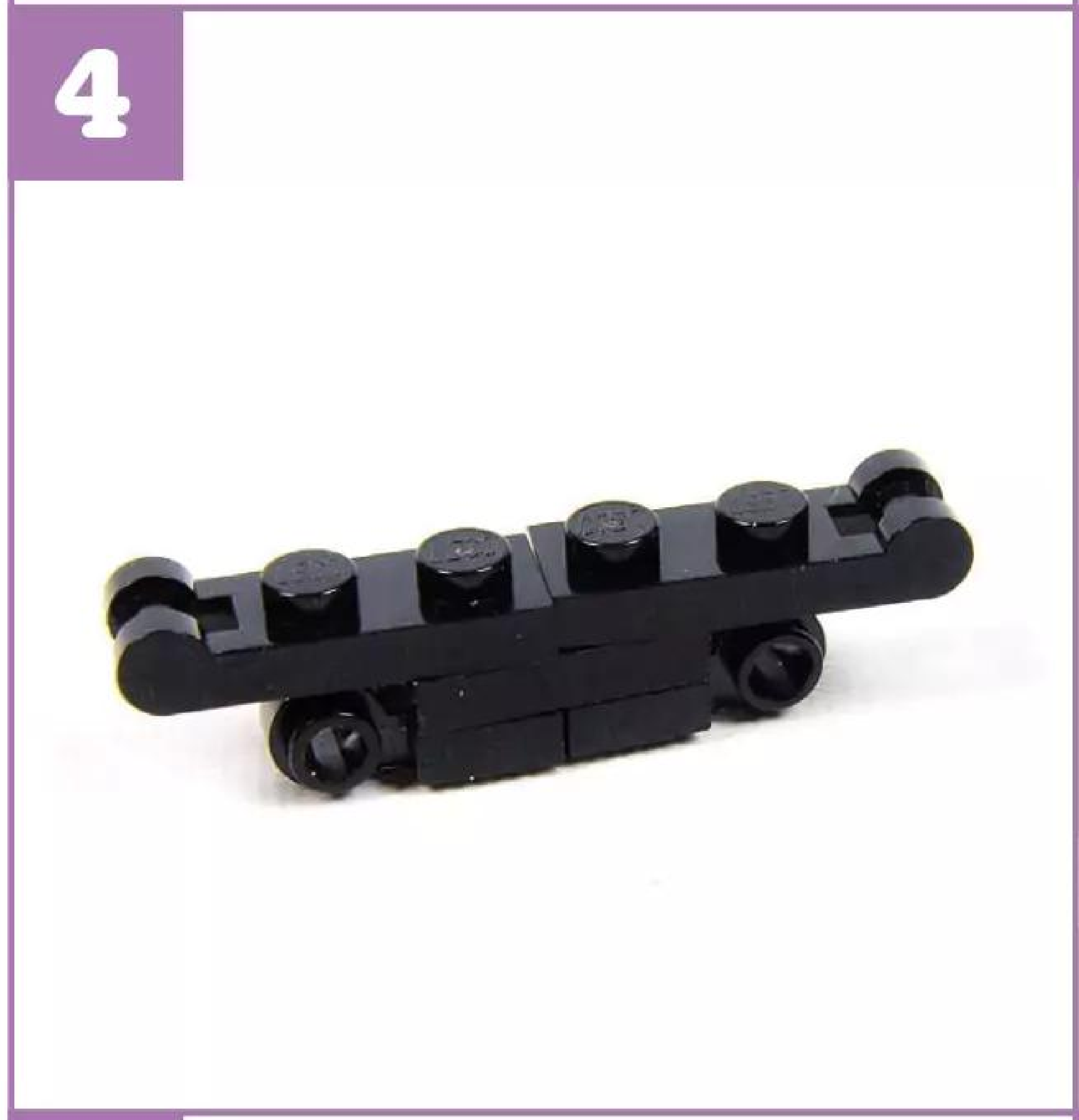

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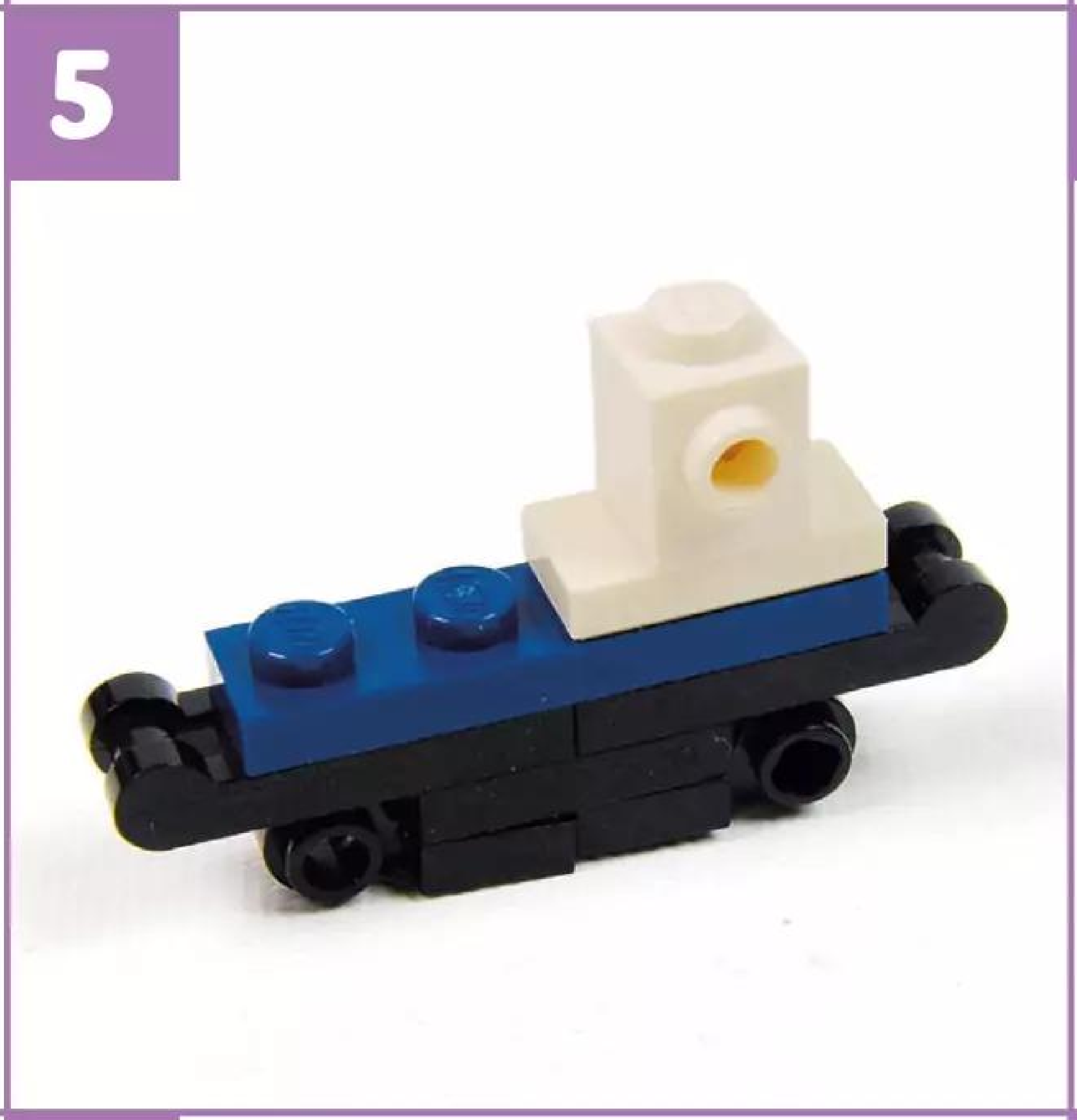

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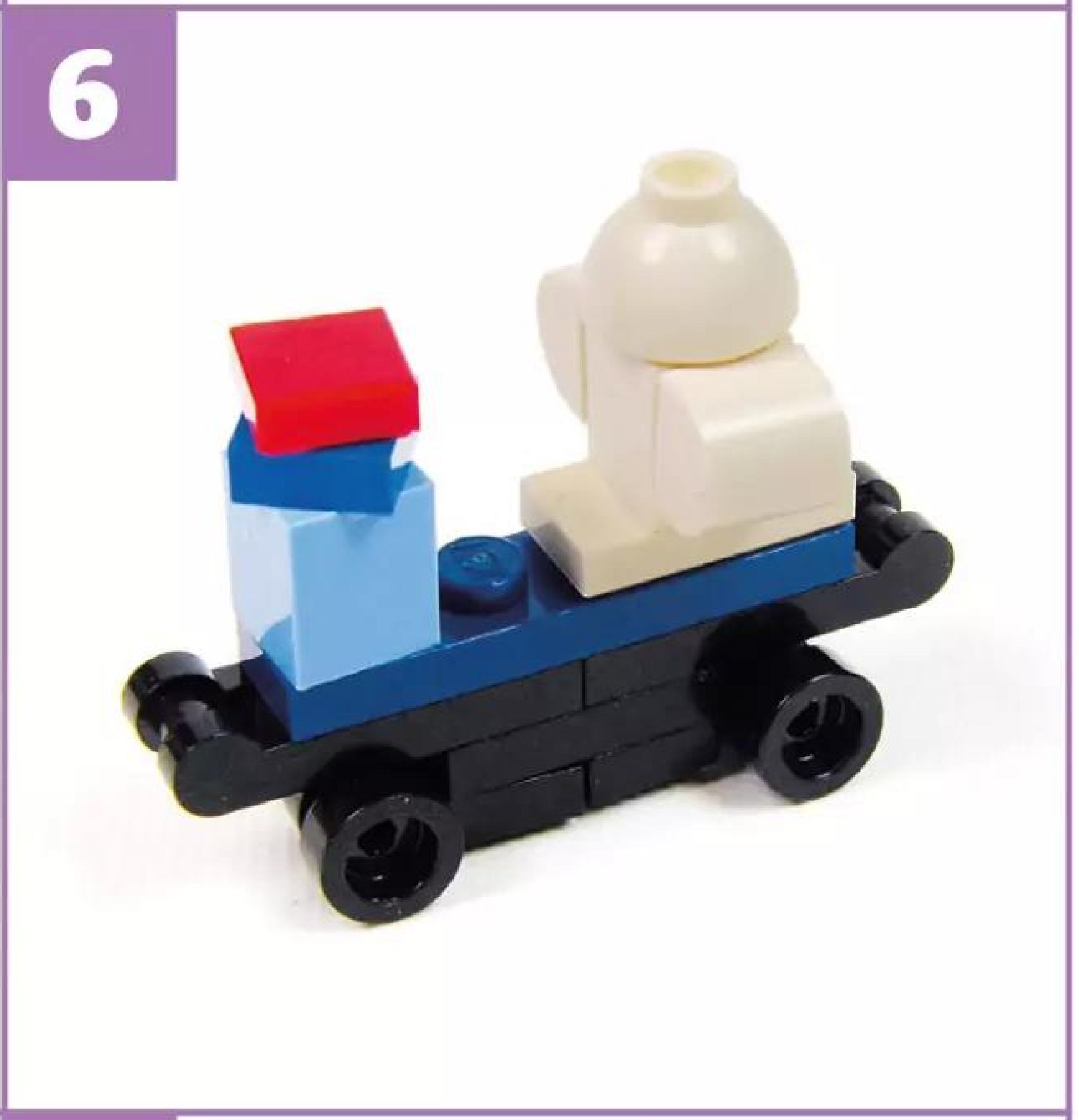

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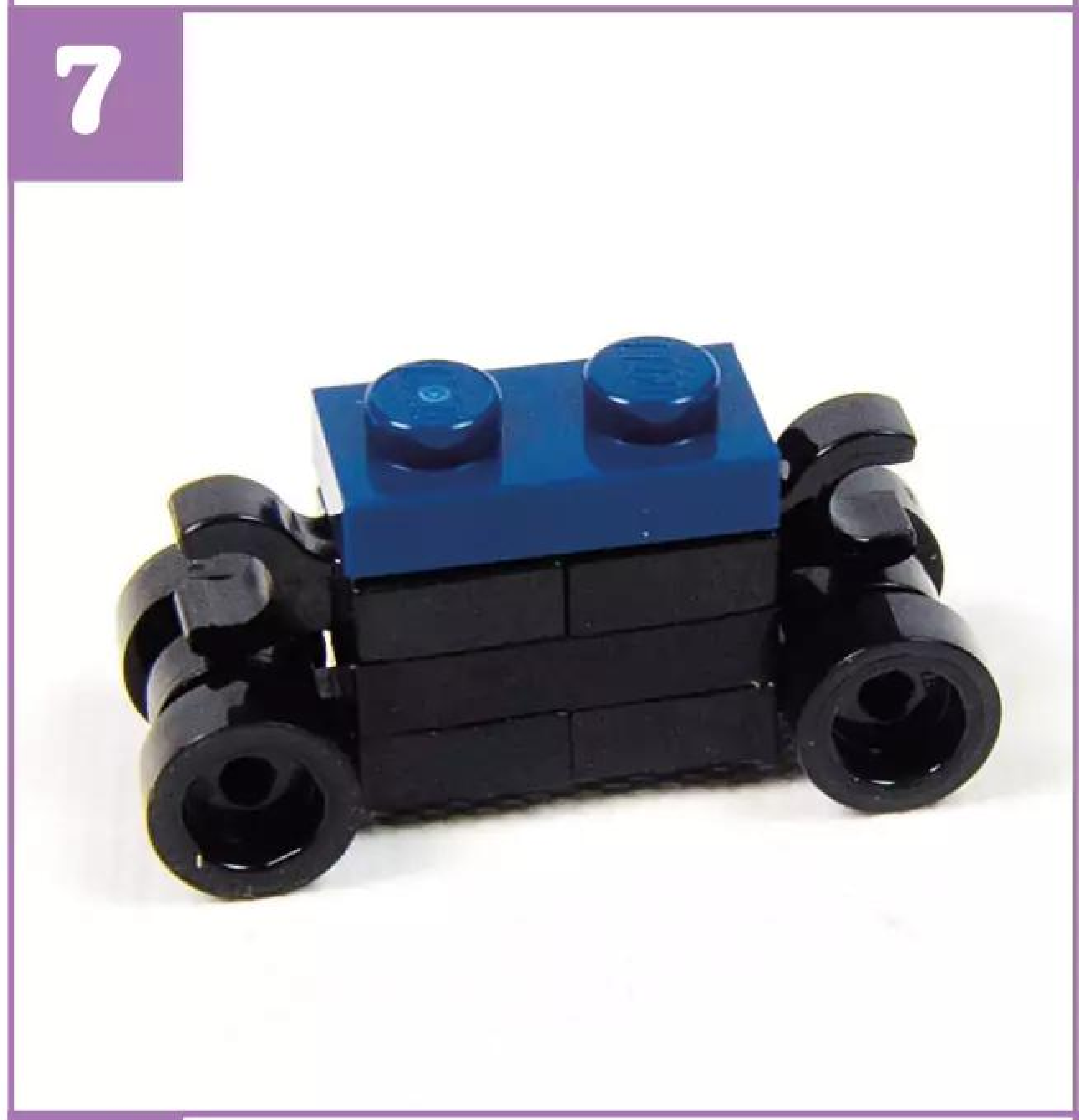

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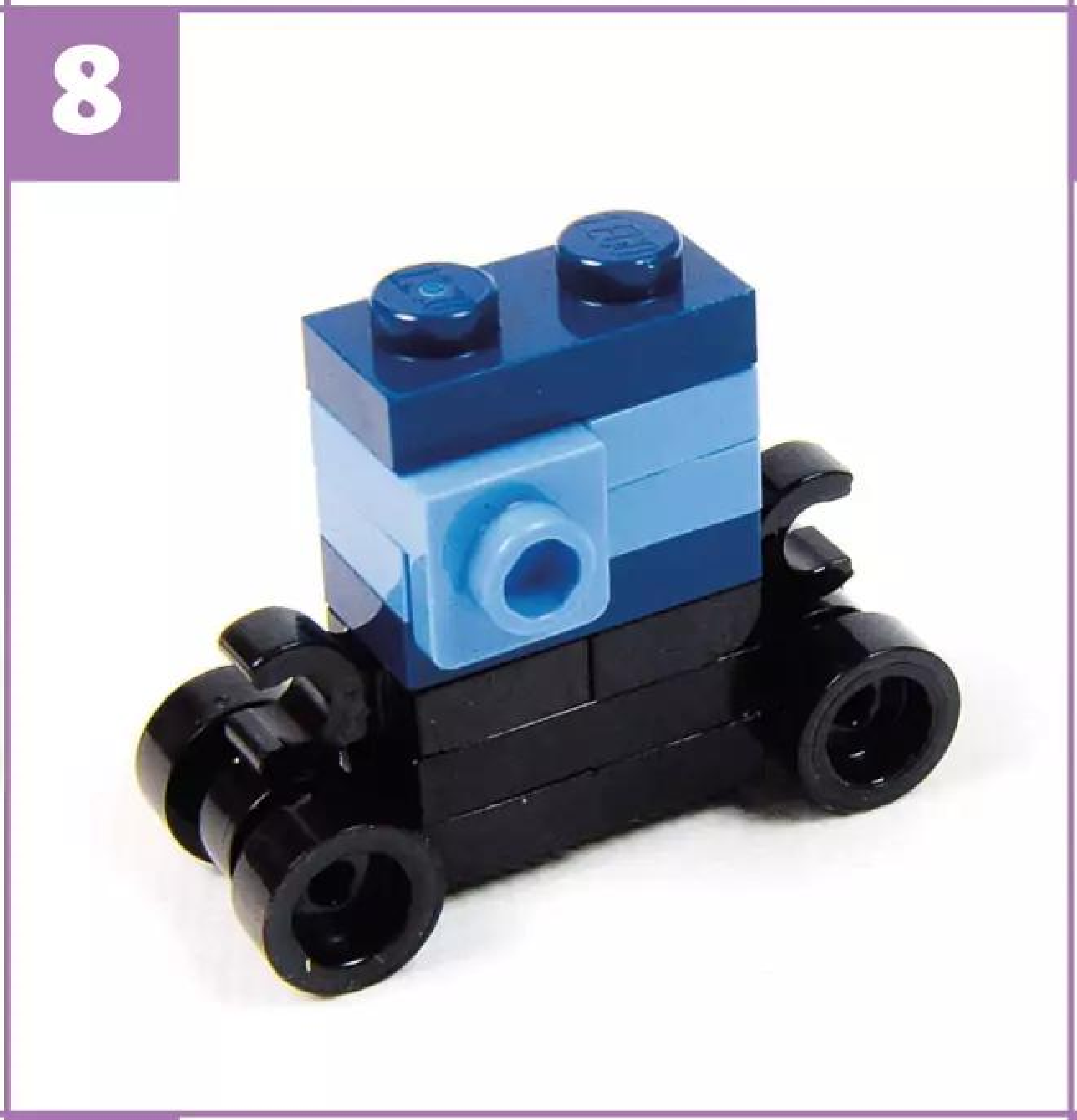

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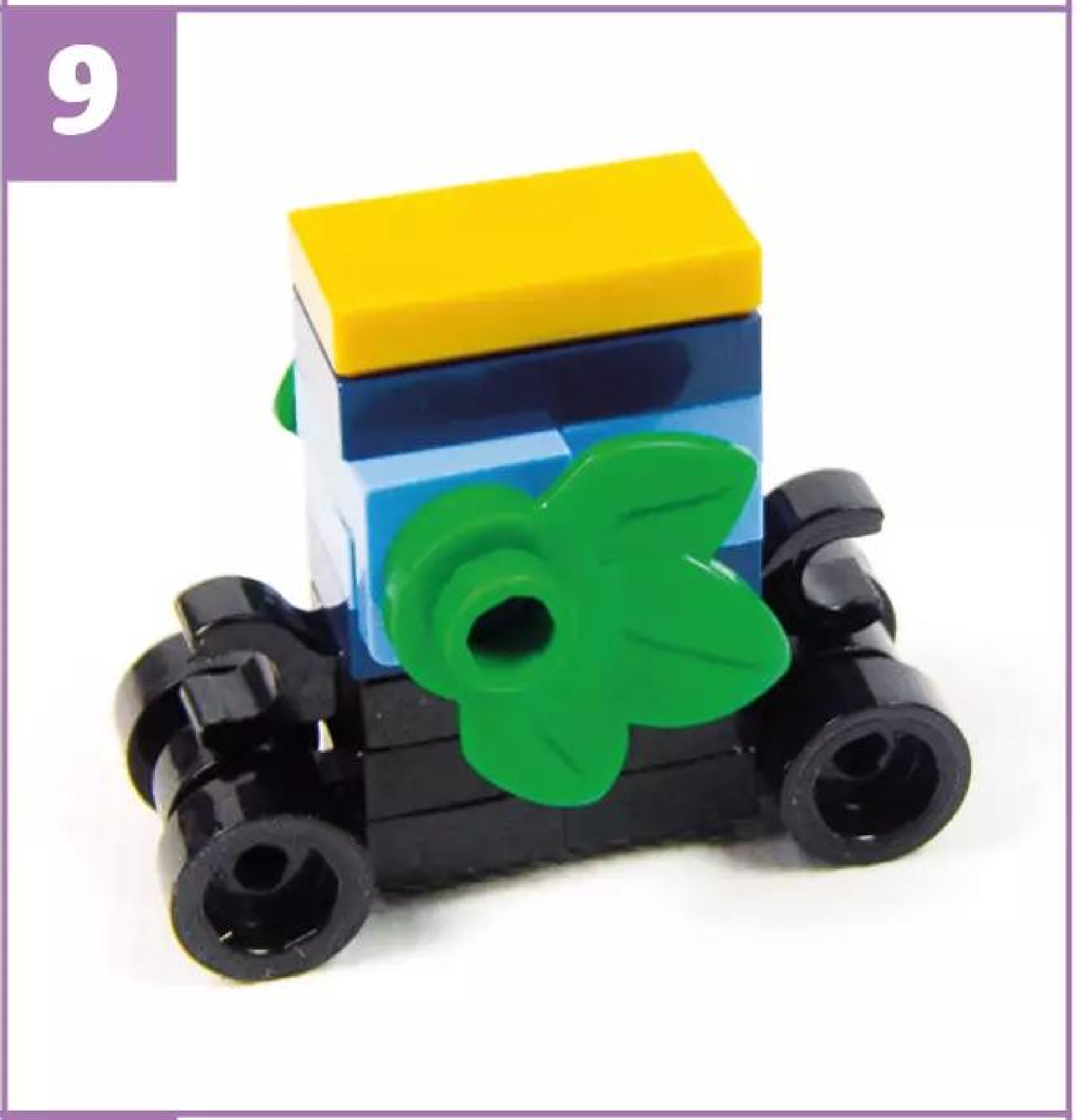

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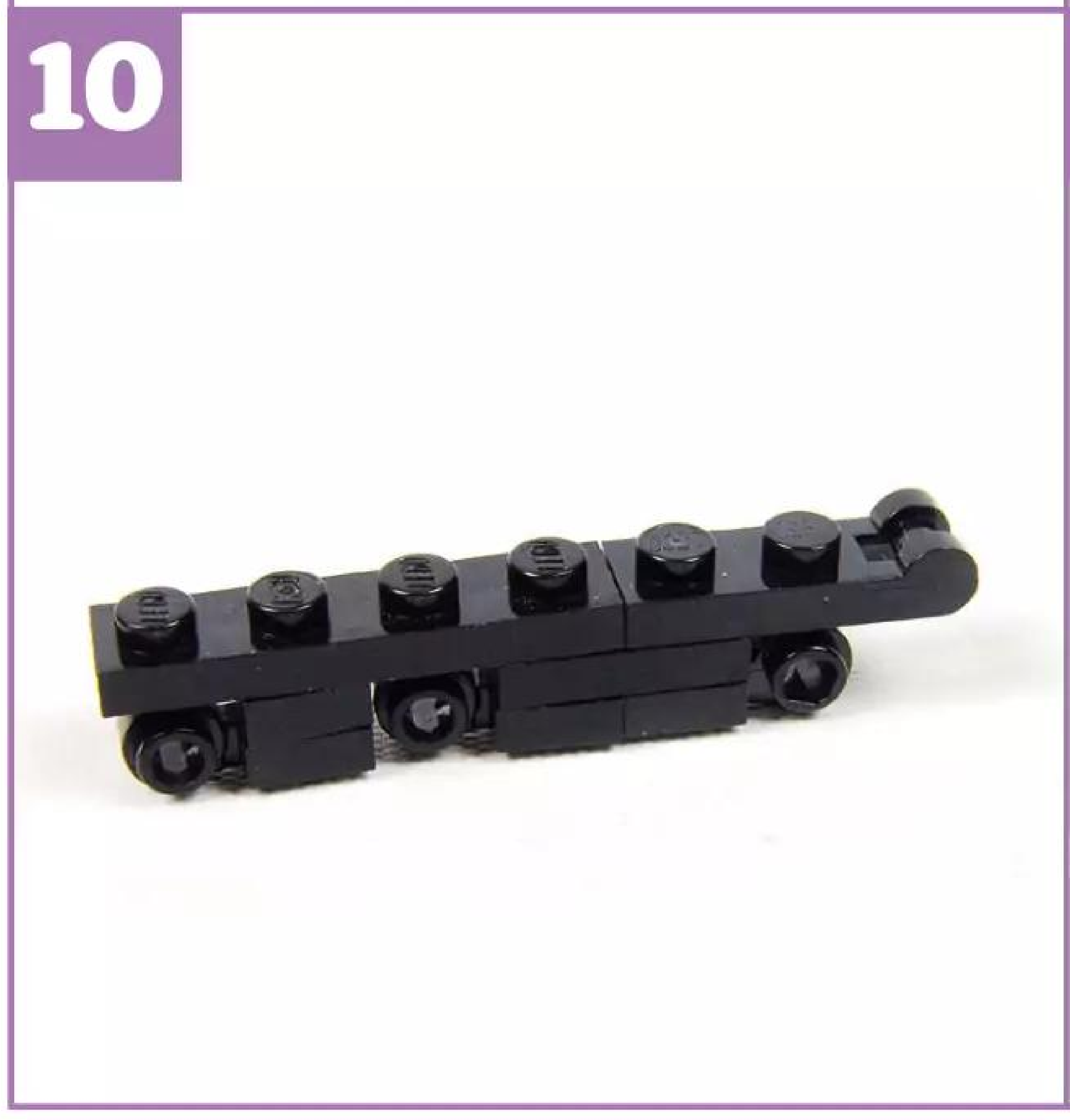

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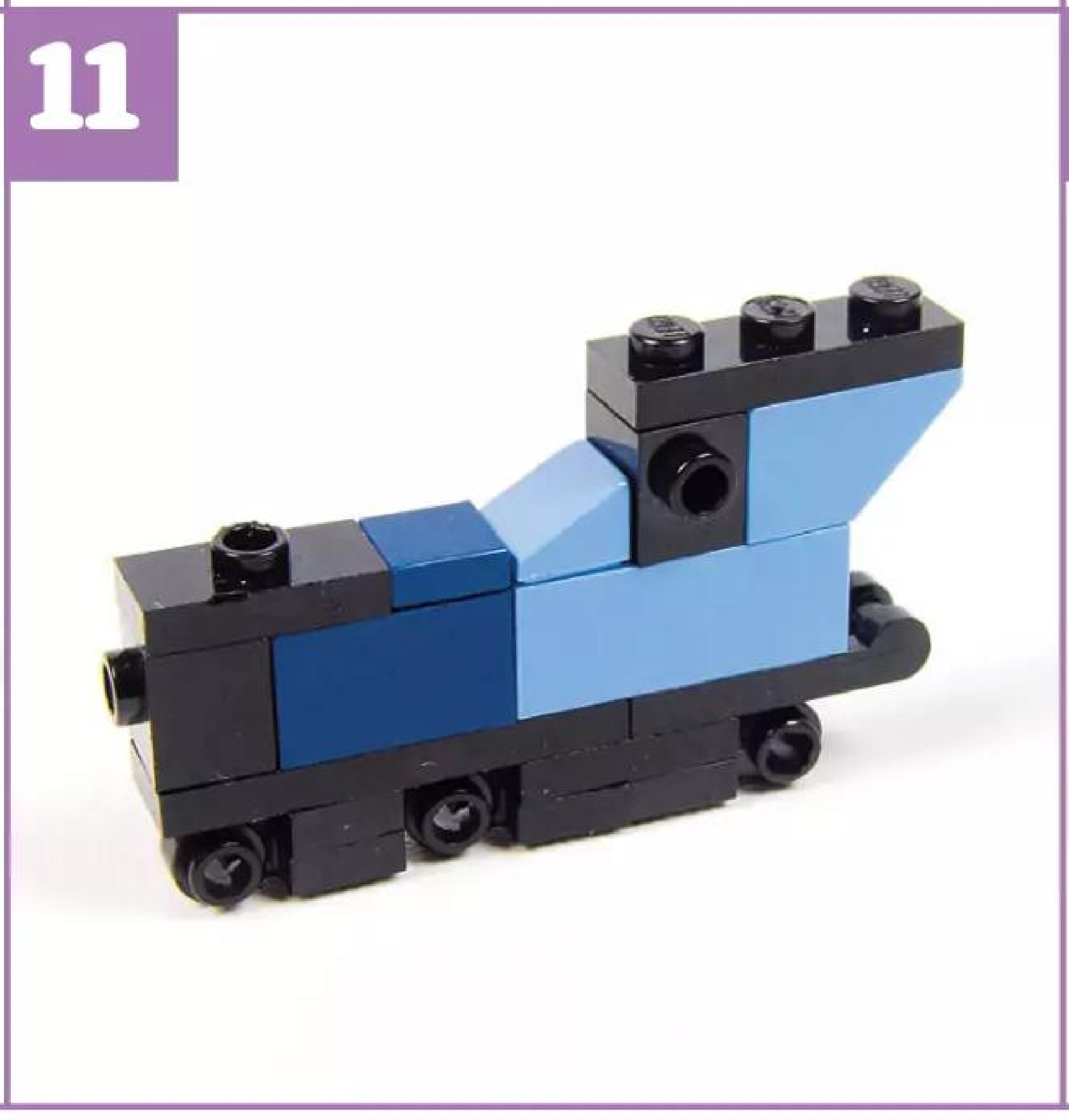

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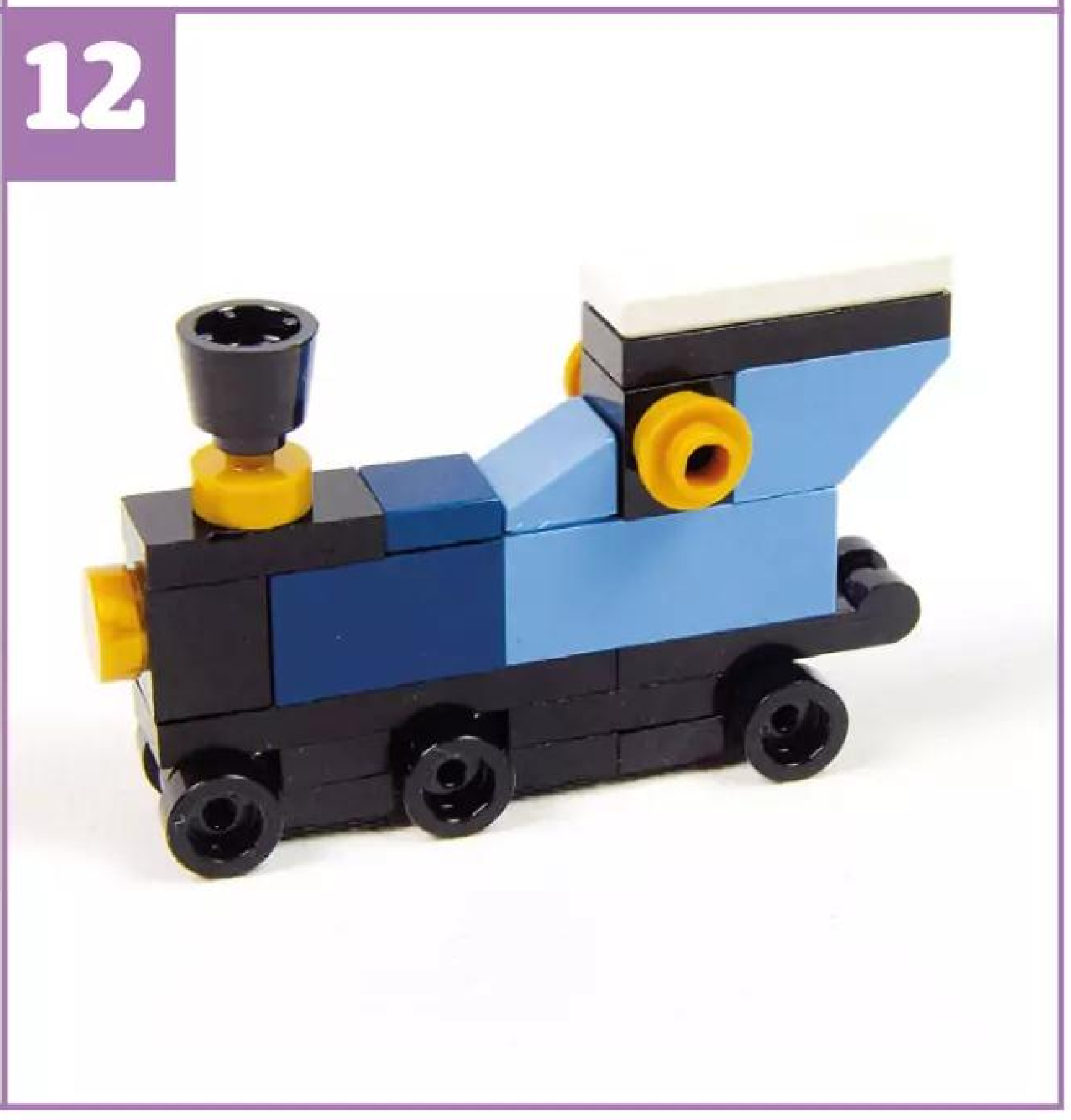

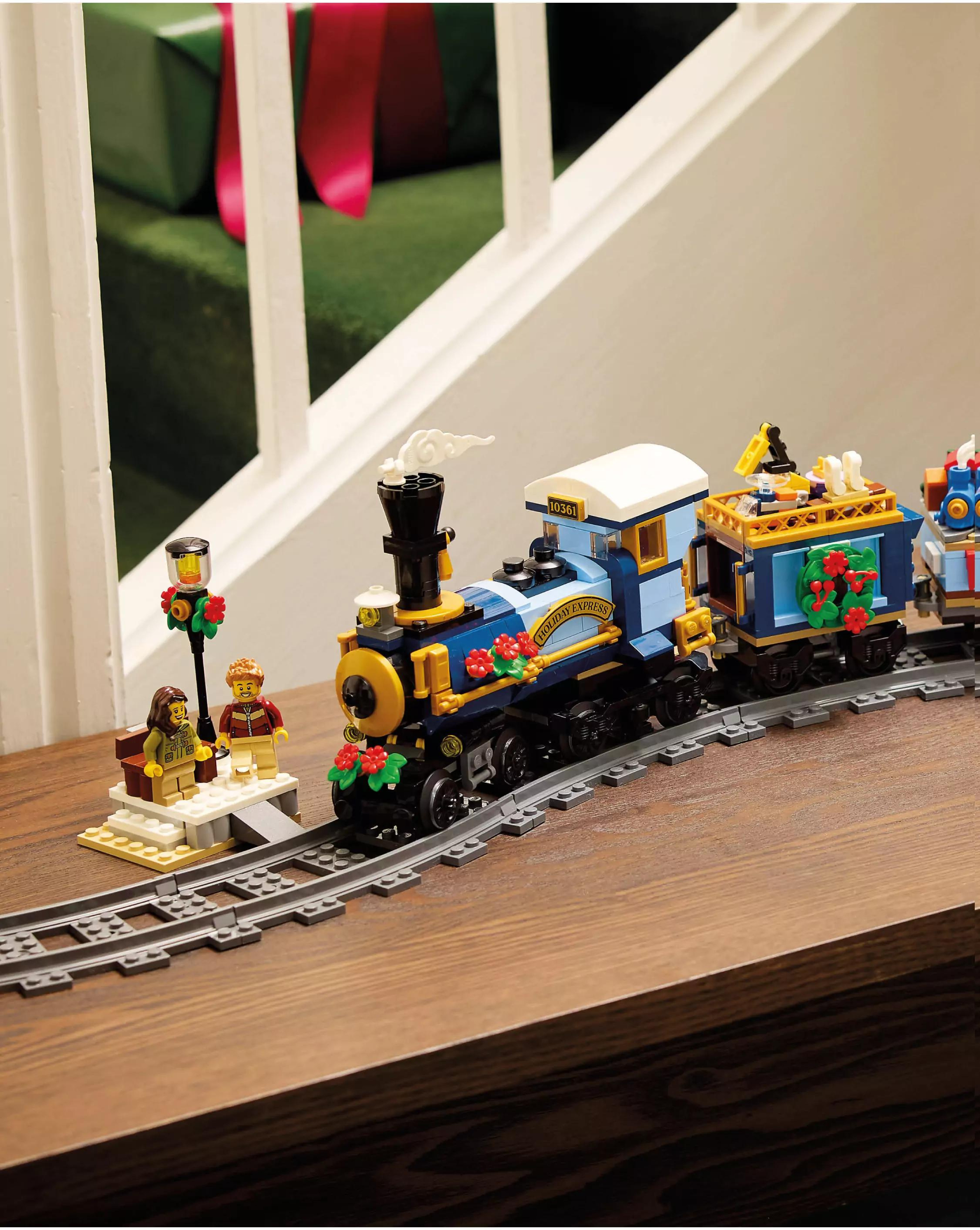
10361
HOLIDAY EXPRESS

10361 Holiday Express Train mixes dark and light blues.

ALL ABOARD FOR FESTIVE FUN

Model Designer Jae Won Lee is feeling the spirit of the season as he explains how 10361 Holiday Express Train continues the Christmas journey for a special pair of minifigure passengers

Words: *Anthony Walker-Cook* ***Interview:*** *Graham E. Hancock*

To capture the holiday feeling you only need a mug of hot chocolate, a mince pie and a favourite Christmas album playing in the background. Well, there's one thing that would make it more festive – the latest LEGO Winter Village Collection set to build. For many fans, the annual tradition of a detailed set to capture the spirit of the season is now an essential part of the holiday.

Having a train around the bottom of a Christmas tree is a much longer tradition that dates back to the beginning of the twentieth century, in part evoking the excitement of travelling home for Christmas at a time when trains were more popular and accessible than cars as a mode of transportation. Since then, popular books like Chris Van Allsburg's The Polar Express (1985) have further solidified the connection between trains and Christmas.

10361 Holiday Express Train ties into this iconography and taps into the timeless excitement of seeing boxes of all shapes and sizes around the tree.

Model Designer Jae Won Lee was determined that 10361 Holiday Express Train would have a distinct identity, despite being the third steam engine of this sort. Nine years after the last one, it includes everything you need to build the train itself, the track to run it on, the minifigures for it to carry and an extra special bonus. Anyone who wants to see it running around the tree will need to buy Powered Up! components and follow the instructions to make it go.

Intergenerational building was a key consideration as Jae conceived and worked on the model. "When we decided to have a track, we were thinking about the idea of families building the set. While the parents are building parts of the train, the kids can be playing with the other parts on the tracks while they are waiting. That was part of the first discussion about why we needed to include the track."

FULL STEAM AHEAD

For Jae, getting to work on the Holiday Express Train was a gift in and of itself. "I'm a big fan of trains – I had a lot of train sets during my childhood – so I wanted to make this steam locomotive. This was a good chance to make my dreams come true."

While it may be the first time he has designed a train, the first festively adorned locomotive was released in 2006. 10173 Holiday Train features three carriages (one for people, another for trees and, vitally, a large open-topped car filled with presents), the first set for adults that truly celebrated the season. 10254 Winter Holiday Train launched in 2016, then the accompanying 10259 Winter Village Station followed the year after.

Those two trains were similar to one another, in style and colour scheme. This new Icons set offered an opportunity to do something new. "It is the perfect time to have a new train. I wanted to make it different to those from before – I wanted to make it cuter and chibi.

"As a child I always made western styled trains, I honestly didn't think about seasonal trains, so it was hard to handle the colours. This theme is hard to design for, to consider all of the flower decorations and ribbons. The winter train is often for the Christmas season, but I didn't want to limit it; the design team wanted it to be a winter express train for the whole season."

The two previous Christmas trains have a more realistic colour scheme, so the designer saw an opportunity to distinguish this one from its predecessors.

"The trains before used red, green and black, so when I started on this project I wanted to make it different from those. I wanted it to be lighter. I did lots of different mock ups with red, silver and white, but blue was the most suitable for the new storyline.

"When we were imagining the train tour route or journey, we thought, 'what if the train was departing from the North Pole and going to the South Pole?' That's why I wanted to put some polar bears on the wagon. The North and South Poles are quite cold places and the bluish colour scheme reflects that."

Winter Village sets have covered a range of aspects and experiences that are key to the festive period, from shopping (10308 Holiday Main Street) to hygge holidays away (10325 Alpine Lodge). While storytelling is part of both of those sets, it is even more apparent in 10339 Santa's Post Office and 10293 Santa's Visit, which provide a complete narrative arc that begins with posting a letter to Santa and ends with the red-suited Papa Noel sliding down the chimney.

As Jae thought about the story of the train, he identified a way in through the minifigures and realised he could connect it to 10254 Winter Holiday Train. "The storyline begins in 2016, with the boy and girl minifigures included in the previous train.

"When I was considering what would be a special story for this train, those two figures caught my eye and I thought they would make a good starting point for this set's story. During their journey as kids, they agreed to meet again after nine years when they are grown up. With my colleague [Graphic Designer] Crisy Dyment, we made two adult minifigures who continue this story."

If this sounds like something out of a Hallmark movie, brimming with nostalgia and intimacy, Jae had indeed first thought that the relationship between the two characters should be a romantic one. However, as much as Christmas is about cosy corners and mistletoe, he realised it was better to let the builder decide the nature of the minifigures' relationship.

"At first, I imagined the boy would propose to the girl after nine years. I shared this with my team and they thought it could be really nice. But I abandoned the story, because if someone had the previous set and thought the figures were family, like cousins or siblings, I don't want there to be limits on their imagination. They were there in 2016, they are together again here – and the next story is for you to make on your own."

STAYING ON TRACK

When he worked on 10355 Blacktron Renegade, which launched at the beginning of the year, Jae had a clear idea of the functions that it should include. "The Renegade was very easy to redesign and put some of my

"What if the train was departing from the North Pole and going to the South Pole?"

Above, left to right: *The set includes a small town and gifts to build, plus a 3D printed working train.*

The set includes many festive elements.

The tiny platform gives the minifigures a place to wait.

Bottom left: *It is easy to motorise the set, with instructions included in the back of the booklet.*

Right: *LEGO Model Designer Jae Won Lee.*

ideas into it, because when I was a child playing with the set I would always make the model bigger or play with different modules. I had a lot of ideas for that set."

This time around, he had to really think about what functions to incorporate into the train. "We have two functions in this train, what we call the 'choo choo functions', where the steam chimney moves up and down, then at the same time the polar bear's head moves and it rings the bell. The previous train had a spinning tree, so we needed to do something more."

The Winter Express Train is made up of three key parts – the locomotive, the polar bear car and the dining car. Inevitably, the model evolved throughout the design process. "In the first version, the dining car was bigger, I wanted to include some snack bars or make a fancy dining car. But I didn't have the budget or space for that, so I made it the same scale and proportions as the other wagons. Maybe when the set is released, I'll buy two and make a bigger car with my daughter!

"A red ribbon is iconic, it represents a gift box or something similar, so I made the dining car look like it's wrapped up because I wanted to show that in this car there's something quite special between the two figures who share that story."

> "Two figures caught my eye and I thought they would make a good starting point."

One of the most magical parts of the Santa Claus mythology is working out what powers his sleigh – is it regular magic, the power of belief or a massive engine? Jae and the design team behind the Holiday Express Train did reflect on what gives their train its energy.

"In the engine room, we have a small space. When I designed the set, I thought we could put some 2x4 iconic red LEGO bricks inside, which could be an energy source. But I didn't want to get a reputation for burning pieces, so I left it empty."

A VERY SPECIAL GIFT

Brick-built toys have been essential to the Winter Village collection since its inception with the release of 10199 Winter Toy Shop in 2009, which included a steam locomotive, a robot, a jack-in-a-box and a teddy bear. Miniature models, often referencing other LEGO themes, have played a key role in the previous festive trains, especially the extended present car in the Holiday Train and a Blacktron themed spaceship in the Winter Holiday Train. The Holiday Express Train continues this tradition, with three microscale models. "One is the land, one is the sea and one is from the sky."

These represent a range of themes, from Technic 42006 Excavator to

City 60437 Jungle Explorer Helicopter at Base Camp. Jae's favourite is the miniature model of 10210 Imperial Flagship, a set that was wish fulfilment for those who adored the 2010 version. "I want to bring some nostalgia to everyone," he says.

There's another small present included in the Holiday Express Train, and it marks a new direction for not only the Winter Village Collection but all LEGO sets – an additive manufacturing produced train element. "We have a very special element in this set – this is the first retail set with a 3D printed piece. Bricks are included in the bags, but there is a small package within the set that contains the train – I hope that people are happy with this special box."

This is not the first LEGO 3D-printed piece – a 3D printed duck, a miniature version of the quintessential wooden toy, was available in limited quantities in 2022; a pogo stick was included with certain crowdfunded copies of Daniel Konstanski's The Secret Life of LEGO Bricks and a 3D drafting arm machine element was a part of 4000034 LEGO System House, the Inside Tour exclusive model from 2019.

However, this is the first time a 3D element is in a traditional LEGO set available to all. Functionality is key to this 3D element – there's a bar on the back, a stud hole on the front and another connector on top for the feather piece, imitating smoke. It illustrates the use case for such a piece, which would be very expensive to produce using traditional plastic injection moulding technology.

Integrating this piece within the wider LEGO portfolio was an essential part of the creative process. "[Design Manager Element Specialist] Bo Park Kristensen designed this one. We tested it a lot, with more than 10 versions. We had to make sure there were lots of connections with our System bricks," Jae says.

"I really wanted to make the train more special, so I designed the small diorama as a display stand for the train. This is a kind of small city, but in my mind, this is Billund. That means this train helps to deliver gifts to all of the world from the LEGO Group in Billund, whilst the piece is a special gift to the builder."

May the Holiday Express Train stop by your home this Christmas and leave behind a box that rattles with promise and excitement.

> **"The steam chimney moves up and down, at the same time the polar bear's head moves."**

Opposite page, from top to bottom: *The additive manufactured element is a mini version of the engine.*

Minifigures from 10254 inspired the characters who appear in 10361.

When you push the train along, the smokestack goes up and down.

The polar bear rings the bell as the train moves.

The set comes with enough track to make a circle.

Below: *10361 can be displayed around 41843 Family Christmas Tree Decoration.*

FESTIVE TRAINS FROM SEASONS PAST

10173 Holiday Train

When 10173 Holiday Train launched in 2006, it wasn't common for the LEGO Group to launch specific Christmas sets. Its three long cars are packed with people, trees or presents, and at the rear there's a classic caboose for the train crew. The Holiday Train is significantly longer than later Christmas trains, as the passenger and train cars use the 6x28 train base plate. The festive colour scheme of green, red, black and white makes it a classic.

10254 Winter Holiday Train

A full decade after the original Holiday Train, 10254 Winter Holiday Train arrived. The Winter Holiday Train is smaller than its predecessor, but it's full of charm. The Christmas tree atop the flatbed wagon rotates as the locomotive moves and the train is generally bedecked with wreaths and lights. A loaded presents wagon provides plenty of fun for the two children minifigures included and there's the passenger car to relax in. Track are included in the box too, so it is ready to position around the bottom of the Christmas tree.

10259 Winter Village Station

A train as festive as the Winter Holiday Train needs a proper station and in 2017 the newest addition to the Winter Village Collection was just that. The station is simple but effective, with a ticket booth and barista providing all you need for your onward journey. An attractive clock tower dominates the building, helping the minifigures keep track of their departures. A level crossing and retro bus are also part of the model, the perfect way for travellers to get to and from the station.

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Building a Family Tradition

LEGO professionals Samuel Liltorp Johnson and Vincente Kenrice Klehr invite Blocks to get into the festive mood and join a Build Together session. While building the enormous new Christmas tree, they discuss the unique thinking that goes into imbuing a set with holiday magic and ensuring it will be a fun family project

Words: *Graham E. Hancock*

10361
HOLIDAY EXPRESS

LEGO building and Christmas are connected like a 1x2 hinge lower and 1x2 hinge upper. Yes, you can separate the two, but it's better to just accept that they are intrinsically linked and are much better for it. The reasons can probably be found in childhood, unwrapping a LEGO set on Christmas morning and then spending the afternoon building it beneath the tree.

"When I used to write my letter to Father Christmas it just said 'LEGO'," says Design Manager Samuel Liltorp Johnson. "I didn't really specify what it was, I was just happy to get something. My dream job was to be a LEGO designer. All I wanted was more LEGO bricks."

"In Denmark, we had this toy store with a physical catalogue, where you could see all of the products and put crosses next to them," recalls Senior Product Manager Vincente Kenrice Klehr. "And I had this wish list of sets. There was this old toy store I could go down to look at them and I was very much into the Castle themes, also this Space faction called UFO, with those special helmets."

The pair are sitting down with Blocks to build part of 41843 Family Christmas Tree Decoration. Samuel is responsible for the physical product, while Vincent's focus is on the digital Build Together experience that is part of the LEGO Builder app.

For fans who are used to paper instructions, the thought of using an app might not sound appealing – but Build Together has been specifically designed to make group building approachable. Once you open the app, you search for the set number and select how many people will be participating.

"One person is the 'host'," says Samuel. "The others dial in to the to the experience, join the build party."

"You'll get a pin code, then you join, then there we have the recommendation of how many builders can be in a build party or in a session," Vincente continues.

A COMMUNAL EXPERIENCE

With the experience started and everyone clipping bricks together, the conversation moves to how the design team explored creating a larger product specifically targeted at a family; not a product for children, not a product for adults but something that everyone can enjoy.

"We were trying to work out when families might want to share products, when they might be together and when they might want to build something together," says Samuel. "And everyone celebrates holidays together.

"A lot of people have been using LEGO sets as something to do with family or with friends, as a group experience. We have 12 Build Together products in total across different themes. If we were going to make one ourselves, it should be the pinnacle family moment of the year, the holidays. It has 24 bags in it, so you can build it over Advent or you can maybe build it during the run up to Christmas, then you have a Christmas tree to have on display. There are many different ways to do it."

It has been designed to be an achievable task – Sam and five colleagues built the set in two and a half hours, although LEGO designers are fast builders, so that should not be considered the norm. After all, there also needs to be time to pour more eggnog and debate the Christmas music choices.

When someone does have to pop to the kitchen to do a bit of serving or turn the oven on though, the app ensures that the build can continue.

"You can start building with a certain amount of family members and then finish up the build with other family members having joined or someone having dropped out," says Vincente. "You can involve more people in the build as it goes on."

Each person builds their own sub-assemblies and sometimes the app will prompt you to pass what you have built to someone else, who will add it to the section they are working on. It's designed so that everyone is constructing roughly the same section, so there are not too many bags open, but it is best to keep each pile of bricks separate and have a note about which bag they came from.

There's no pressure to use the app though; it's just an option. "We also thought about people who want to make a festive LEGO build, but don't want to use the app. We split the building instructions in a modular way, so the set can be built by six people simultaneously through the building instruction booklets. We're trying to cover all the bases of what your perfect Christmas moment might be."

DEVELOPING AN IDEA

Christmas magic was the key thinking throughout the development of the set. "When we started this, there had already been quite a lot of Christmas and holiday themed sets through the years, so we didn't want to just make another one. We want it to feel like an awesome standalone piece, or, if you have a collection already, a great centrepiece.

"Smaller LEGO Christmas trees have been really popular, so we thought about making one that is super grand. We had other ideas, like a big Christmas present or a different play set, but the tree really is the centrepiece of Christmas, so we developed that one.

"Because a Christmas tree has so much volume, breadth all the way around, it gave us a great opportunity to do stuff inside it. That's how we came up with the idea that there could be play scenes in there."

Samuel sketched out a classic looking Christmas tree, inspired by ceramic trees that have a perfect, almost cartoony shape to them. Senior Model Designer Boone Langston took the first pass at building a sketch model, then Senior Model Designer Bill Vollbrecht built a larger version.

"They all became quite conical, because we were using elements that existed, palm elements and other leaves," says Samuel. "All LEGO leaves curve downwards because they are hanging from a tree. If we built leaves within the set it would take hours and hours and hours to piece all that stuff together – so what if we invested in a new element?

"That way we offer more in the set, the bricks aren't all going into individually building green leaves or branches. We created this generic leaf element that gives the shape but also isn't specific to the tree. You get a huge amount of them in the set.

"It has studs on it, we asked for it to have a hole, so you can actually poke bars into it from underneath. Just like a real Christmas tree, you hang the decorations underneath the branches – that's the effect we wanted.

"We wanted to have something that represents lights and the ornaments that you might hang." The baubles recolour the Mysterio helmet from Marvel in transparent red and transparent orange. "This is the first botanical element that has studs on the actual foliage part of it because we wanted you to be able to decorate it as well."

Many Christmas decorations are culturally specific, so the design team had to consider how to decorate the set in a way that would be recognisable globally. "We've kept it minimal so that you can add whatever else you want to from your LEGO brick collection, we've placed stuff that keeps it neutral, the classic reddish, goldish Christmas colour scheme."

It was Design Master John Ho who used the new elements to craft the final model. "He started making the structure and thinking about the

Far left: *Sam and his colleagues designed the set to be part of the Christmas décor.*

Left: *Design Manager Samuel Liltorp Johnson led the development of the set.*

Right: *41843 Family Christmas Tree Decoration has been crafted so that a group can build it together.*

shape, how it can hold all of the weight. He considered how you pick it up and move it around, how you piece it together.

“He did some amazing work on making it structurally sound. There was one point where he came to my desk and swung it around his head because it is so strong. People around us were getting nervous!”

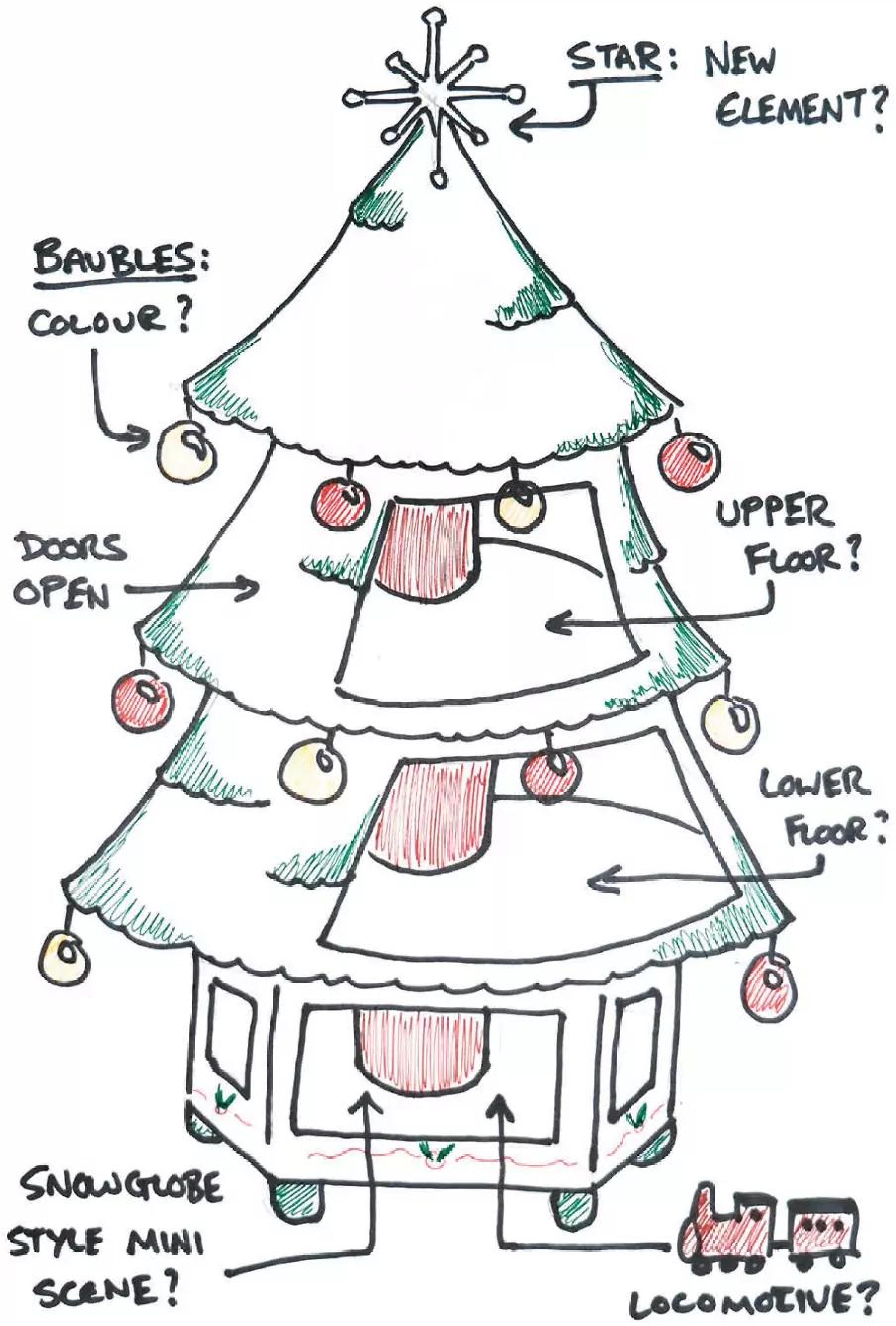
Most people of course won’t be waving the model around or swooshing it as they would a spaceship. It’s destined to become part of the décor when December comes around – or November for the super eager who start watching holiday films as soon as Halloween is over.

“We tried to make it as beautiful as possible so it’s acceptable to the adults in the family that it could be in the shared family space. But we didn’t want it to be off limits to the kids, so we enclosed secrets inside.”

SHARING THE EXPERIENCE

It’s easy enough to imagine how one person with experience building LEGO sets can put together a 3,171-piece Christmas tree, with an appealing exterior and an intricately packed interior. But it’s harder to picture how it can be achievable for multiple people, who will all have different familiarity levels with the brick.

Because the set has been developed with Build Together in mind, the team considered just that as they developed the experience. “The algorithm that creates these building instructions makes it so that people have time to do their part,” says Samuel. “If I invite my grandma, who’s not very fast at building with LEGO bricks, she might take a long time – but it compensates for that, so we won’t have to sit and wait for her to


STAR: NEW ELEMENT?
BAUBLES: COLOUR?
DOORS OPEN
UPPER FLOOR?
LOWER FLOOR?
SNOWGLOBE STYLE MINI SCENE?
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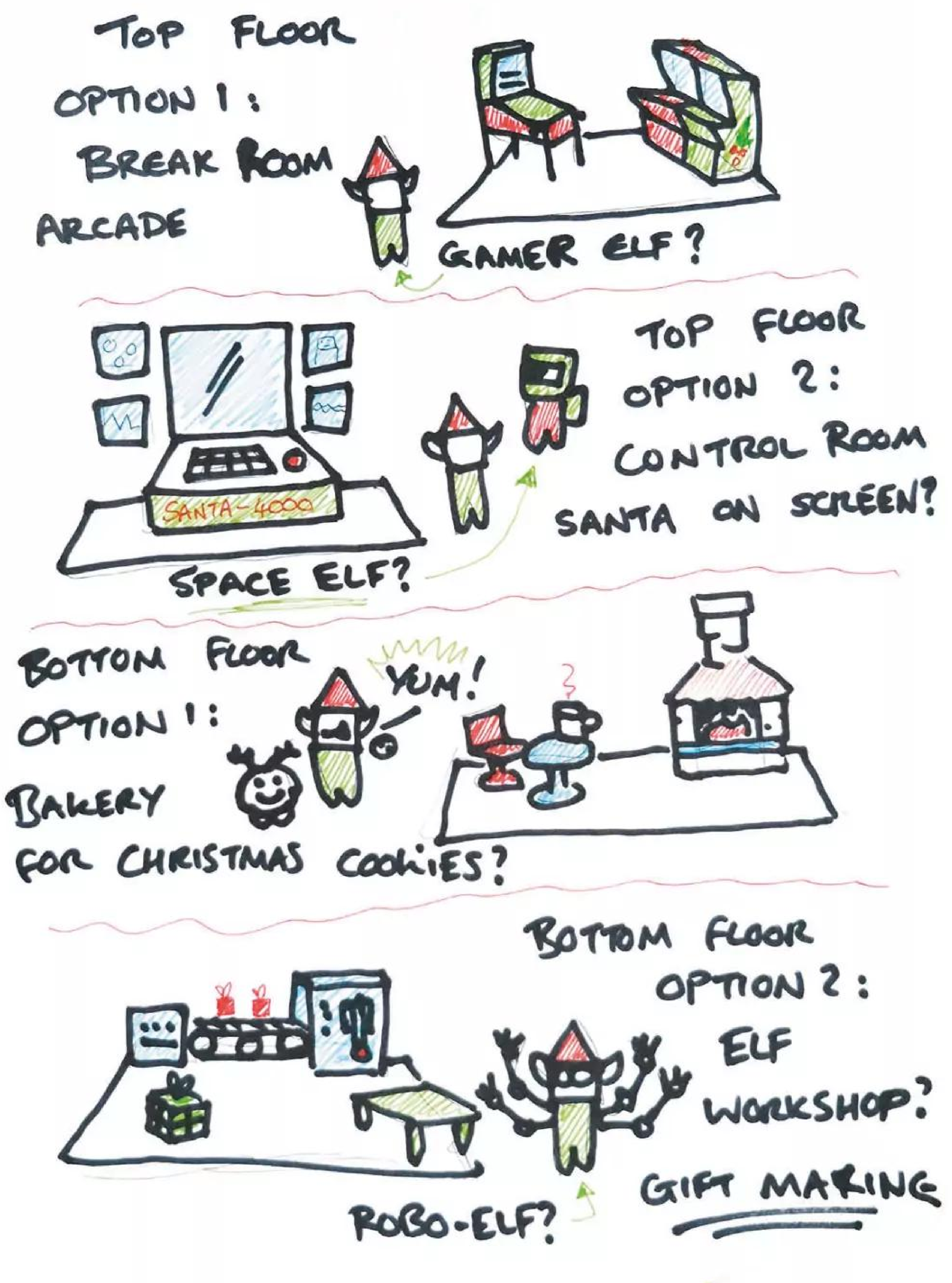

TOP FLOOR OPTION 1: BREAK ROOM ARCADE
GAMER ELF?
TOP FLOOR OPTION 2: CONTROL ROOM SANTA ON SCREEN?
SANTA-4000
SPACE ELF?
BOTTOM FLOOR OPTION 1: BAKERY FOR CHRISTMAS COOKIES?
YUM!
BOTTOM FLOOR OPTION 2: ELF WORKSHOP? GIFT MAKING
ROBO-ELF?

finish, it will just give everyone else more to do."

Vincente is keen to emphasise that the Build Together experience is continually iterated on and being tweaked in response to how people use it. "We have constant new releases to the app, to the experience and the underlying structure of how it is sorting things. We do a lot of experimentation on that side."

The team is also thinking about how to make the process even more satisfying and appealing to those who might sit around the table to build as a group. "When you're introducing multiple people and building a set, the challenge is to ensure that everyone has something meaningful to build. Maybe I want to build the cat, maybe I don't get to build the cat, because that's for you to build during the session.

"We are looking at how can we provide some more agency or choice for you as a consumer to decide what to build. But that also comes with some constraints as well, because if we open it up completely, then people might get disappointed if they don't get what they want, so we can't set up the wrong expectations. We are constantly balancing this and figuring out how to navigate what is meaningful for people to build."

The more that the pair talk about Build Together, the clearer it is that this is still the early part of the journey. "We are also looking at the perception of building LEGO sets in a group setting," says Vincente. "People organically build together, they might find different ways to do it. How do we communicate this experience? How is this different from you sitting together as a family and sharing the booklet? What does it bring to the table that gives you a different experience? We're looking into those things."

"Our intention is not to replace booklet building, but to offer a new experience that people might not have tried before, that maybe offers them more social interaction," adds Samuel. "Building a LEGO set is the perfect way to wind down and chill out alone, we don't want to take away from that – it's not a board game where you have to have lots of people – but we want to provide an experience for a family or a group of friends."

"It's offering a value add to the set, it can be for families to build, but it can also be adults getting together and building," says Vincente. "It can be something for an occasion like Valentine's Day, where you come together and you have a nice activity. We've actually had some feedback that people also use it to introduce other people to LEGO building, to their hobby and passion."

THE STORY WITHIN

Once they were working on a Christmas tree, the designers had a clear path to follow. The storytelling opportunities in the set, however, were wide open and gave the design team space to unleash their festive imaginations. "We tried out all of these different things based on the Christmas tree icon. We had a tree where a launch pad folded out, there were rocket boosters and stuff."

The rocket concept, along with the industrial feel of the North Pole depicted in The Santa Clause, inspired Samuel and his colleagues to a different concept. "What if there is a big Santa sat nav and he can video call back to the elves? We were having a lot of fun creating these silly stories, a more techie side of what Christmas could be, so we made Santa's control room with a Batcave style computer.

"Santa is everywhere. He even made himself employee of the month. We kept coming up with these silly stories, so when we have a label it will make you laugh, there are things like Santa's wi-fi code."

That gave space to have some fun with the minifigures. The design of Santa Claus and Mrs Claus is well established within the LEGO world, but the elves offered a lot of space for creative interpretation.

"If they are going make all the toys here, do they play with them? That's where it all started. Do they try on the outfits that they're making for kids? We started to dress them up, so there's a knight, at one point we had a green ninja, where we put the hood on an elf. There's actually a picture of the ninja elf still in the set, we have a Hall of Fame where they have their pictures on the wall.

"We decided that maybe the elves have interests that people who are building the set might have. There's a tech elf, a medieval elf, a Space elf, a cute elf with the love eyes and a skiing one. We really wanted to give every character a reason for existing and not be generic. Each one has a purpose in the set."

That means that just like the rest of the set, everyone who is participating in the build can put together a fun minifigure. While the concept of family and togetherness has been woven throughout 41843 Family Christmas Tree Decoration, it is still a satisfying solo build – so there is still the option to put on an audiobook of A Christmas Carol and put it together the traditional way.

"We're not affecting so much the design of a LEGO set or the way the pieces go together," says Samuel "We're trying to enhance it."

Perhaps in a decade or so, a whole generation of children will have their own festive memories of building LEGO sets. Not necessarily what they were writing on their wish list for Santa, instead the tradition of building a Christmas themed LEGO set with their parents. With new ways of building like this, the connection between the brick and the holiday is only likely to get stronger.

"We want to provide an experience for a family or a group of friends."

Above left: There is an entire miniature world inside the model.

Far left: Sam's sketches indicates how the design team thinks about aesthetics.

Left: The team developed a new leaf element for the set.

Game Boy

Whether you fondly remember Super Mario Land or Pokémon, relive your gaming youth by recreating the definitive handheld classic in miniature form

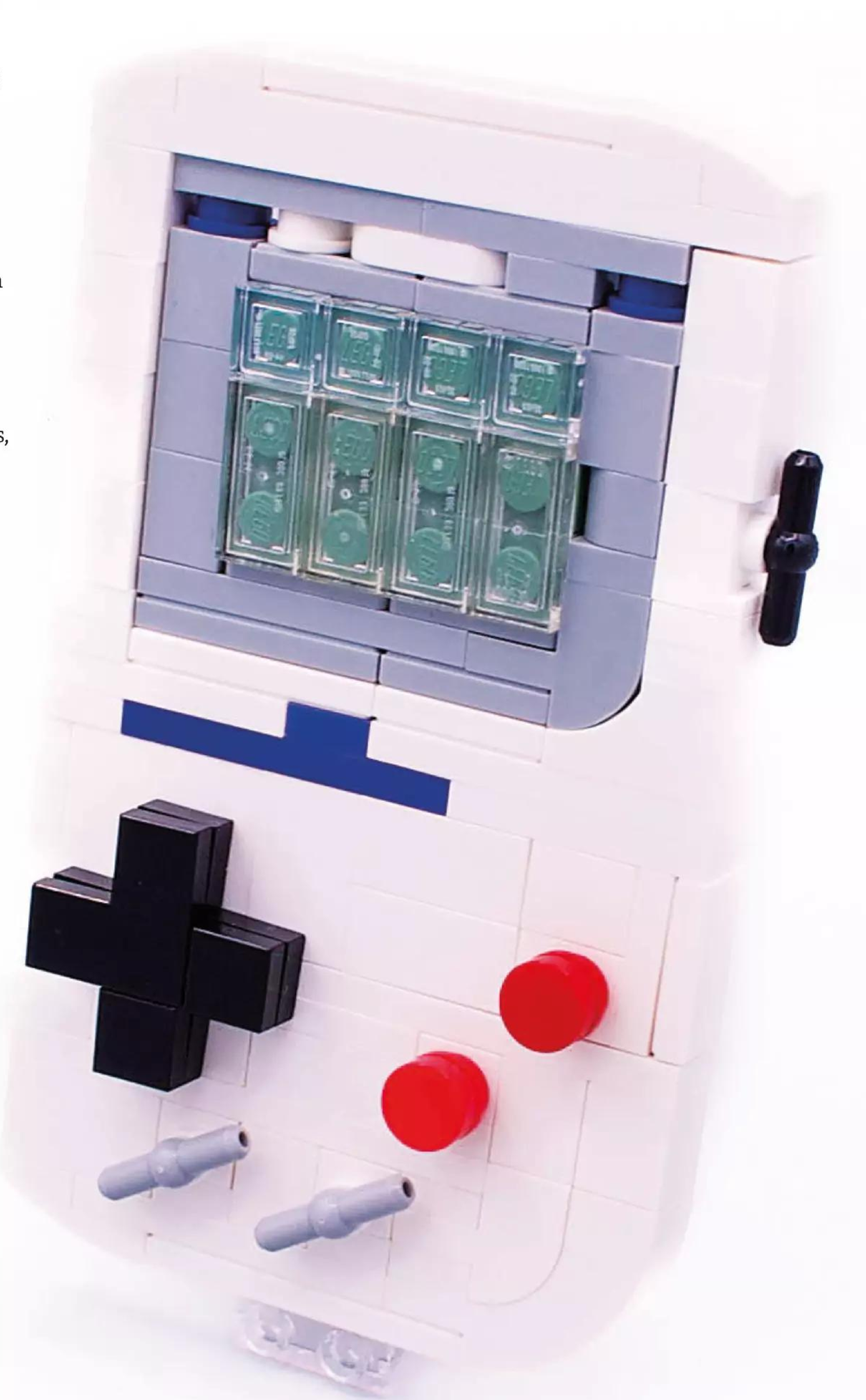
The Game Boy is one of the most recognisable gaming devices of all time and marked a turning point in how an entire generation experienced play on the go. Recently offered by the LEGO Group as 72046 Game Boy, it is the definitive rendition of Nintendo's iconic handheld.

The perfect blocky shape, grey palette and screen design make it ideal subject for a challenge to see if it can be made even smaller. This miniature recreation seeks to capture some of that same accuracy in an even smaller package.

The challenge in miniaturising the Game Boy is preserving the iconic proportions of buttons, screen and cartridge slot closely enough that the model doesn't look distorted. Careful part selection is key to differentiating the control pad from the A and B buttons, while also suggesting the speaker grille and side dials in a convincing way. Using smooth curved slopes and tile work helps the screen stand out as the focal point. Subtle shaping ensures the model feels clean and intentional rather than overly blocky.

This build naturally invites a host of companion projects. Other handhelds such as the Game & Watch or Game Boy Advance could be adapted in a similar fashion to create a series that charts the evolution of portable gaming.

WILL TACHICK



Get the parts list: blocksmag.com/goto/game-boy

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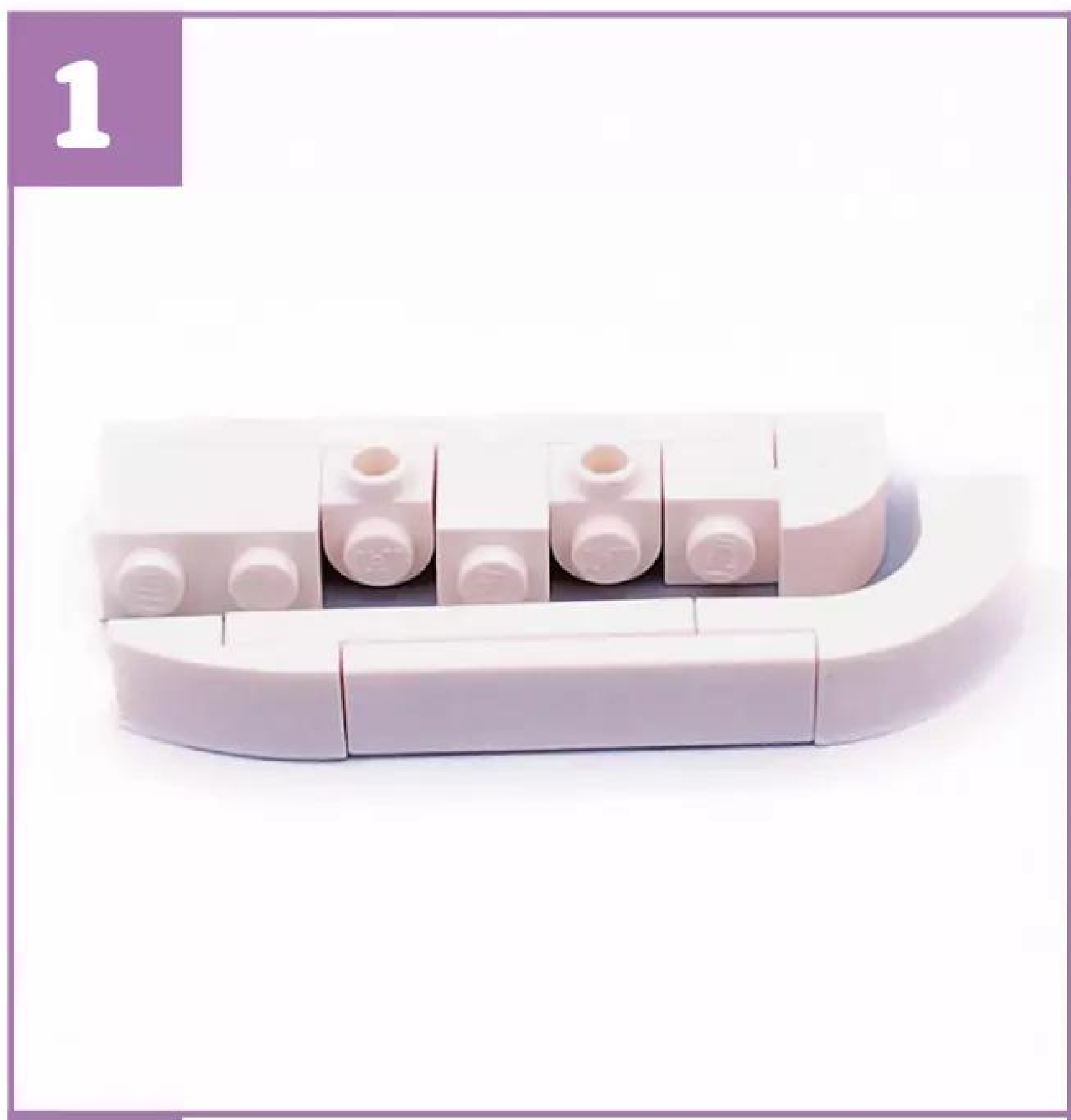

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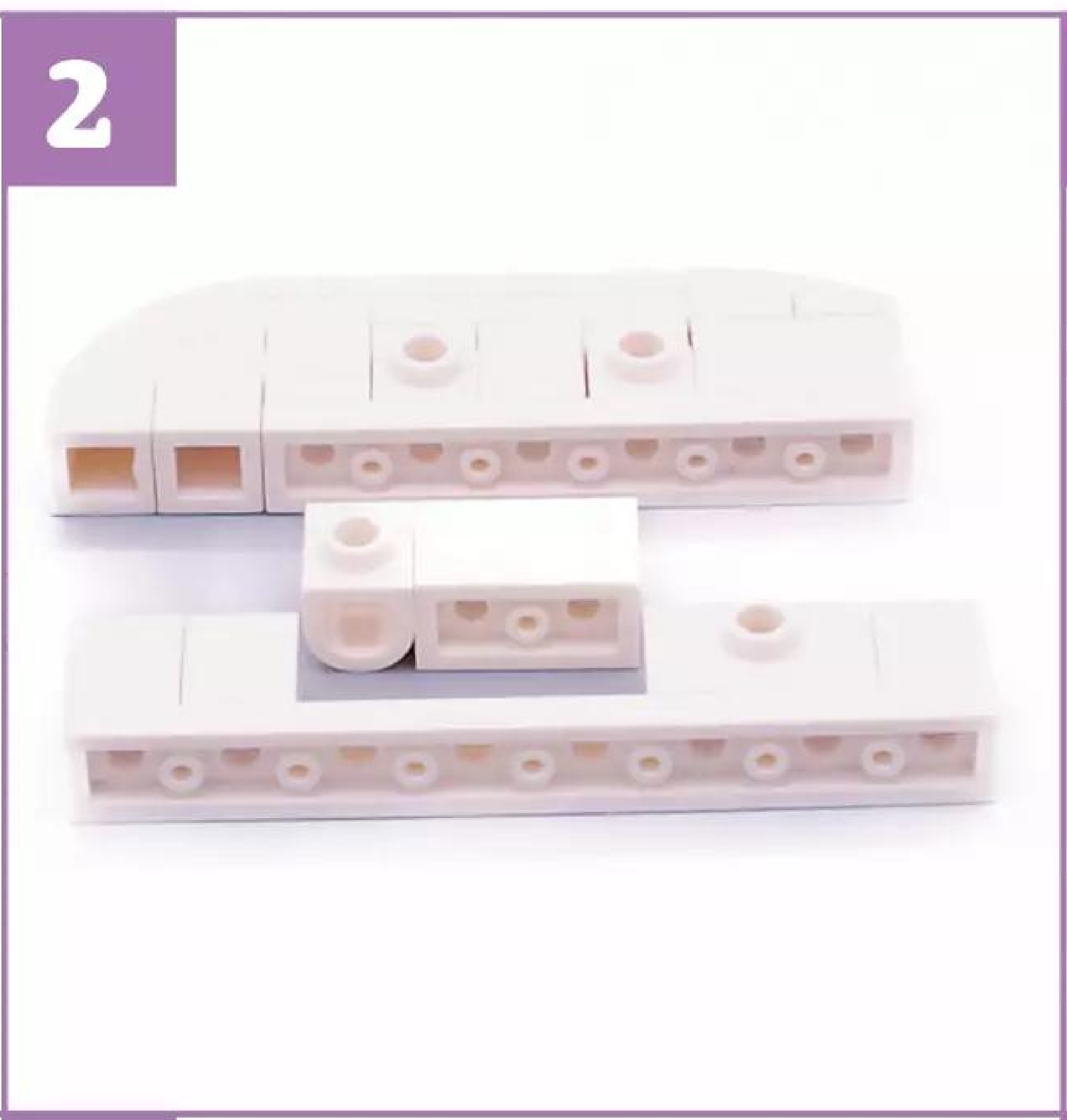

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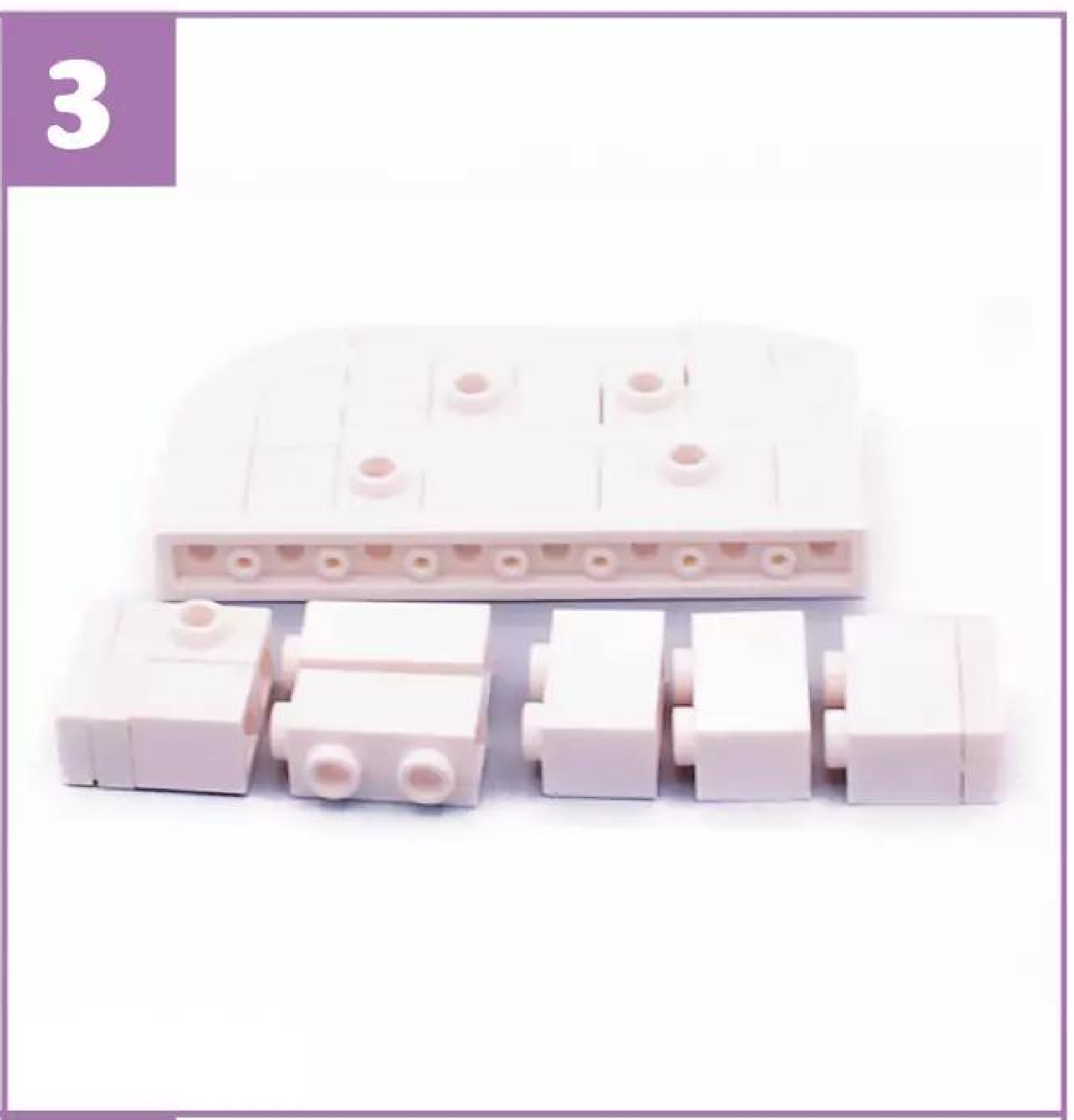

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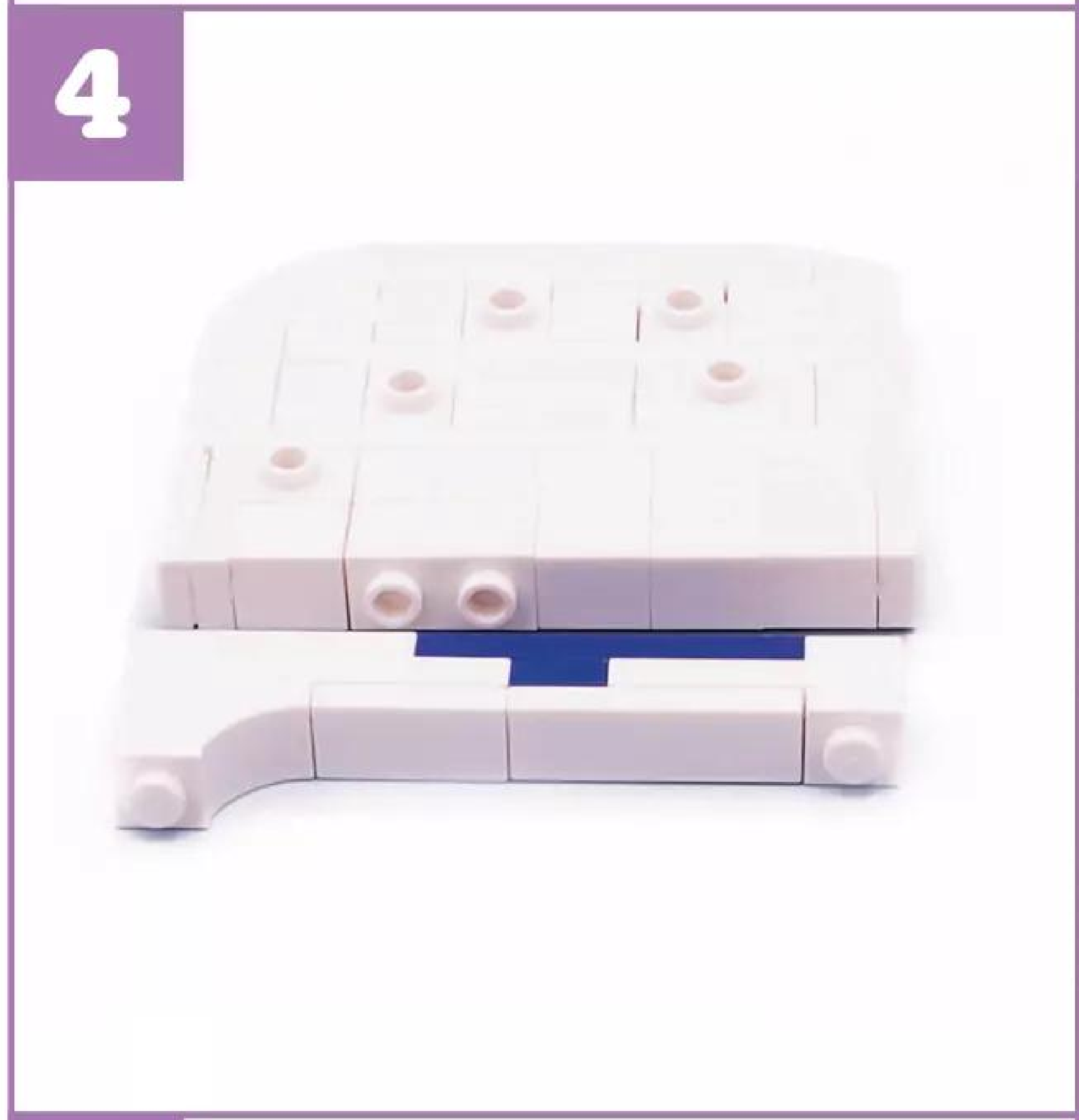

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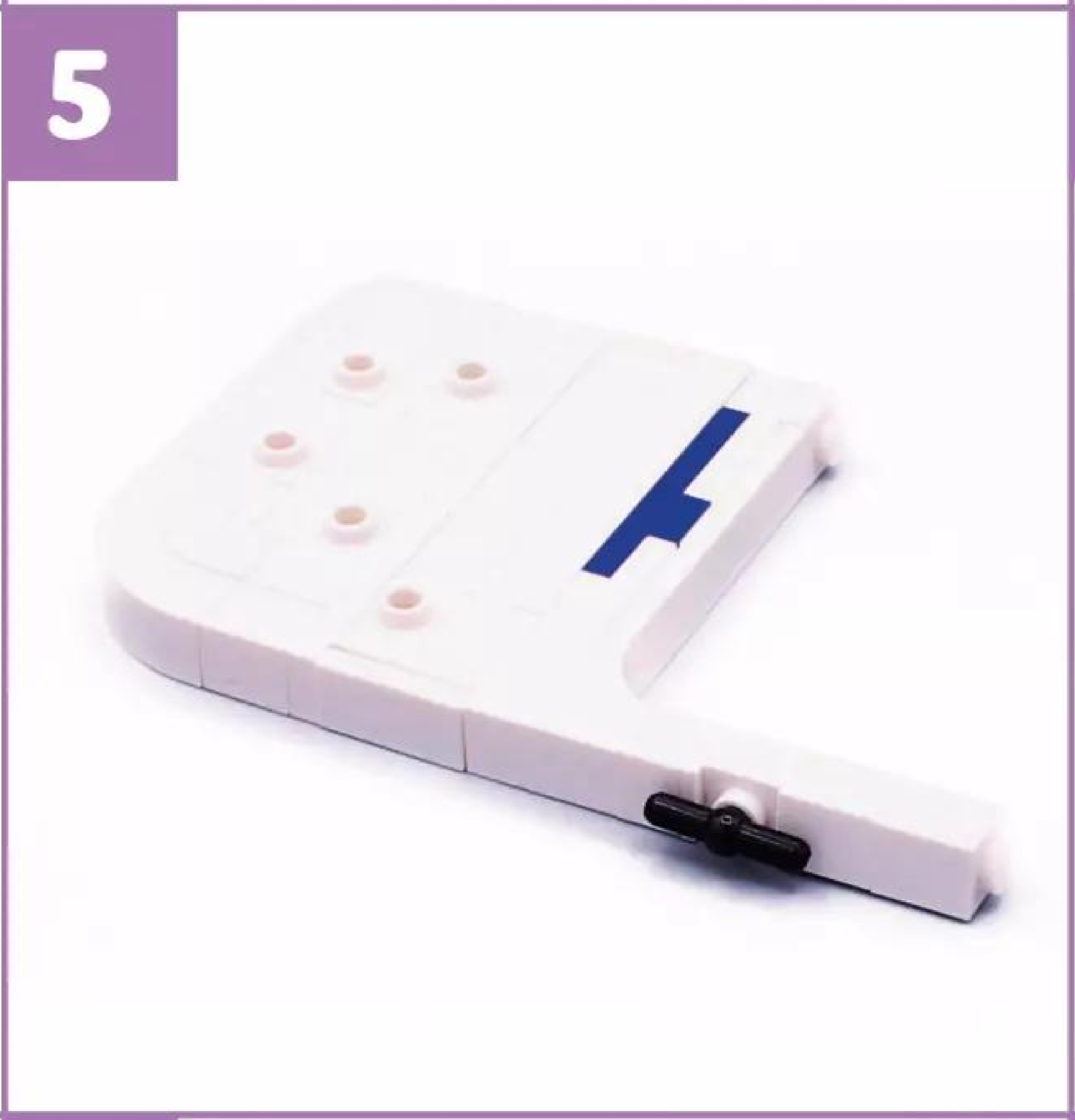

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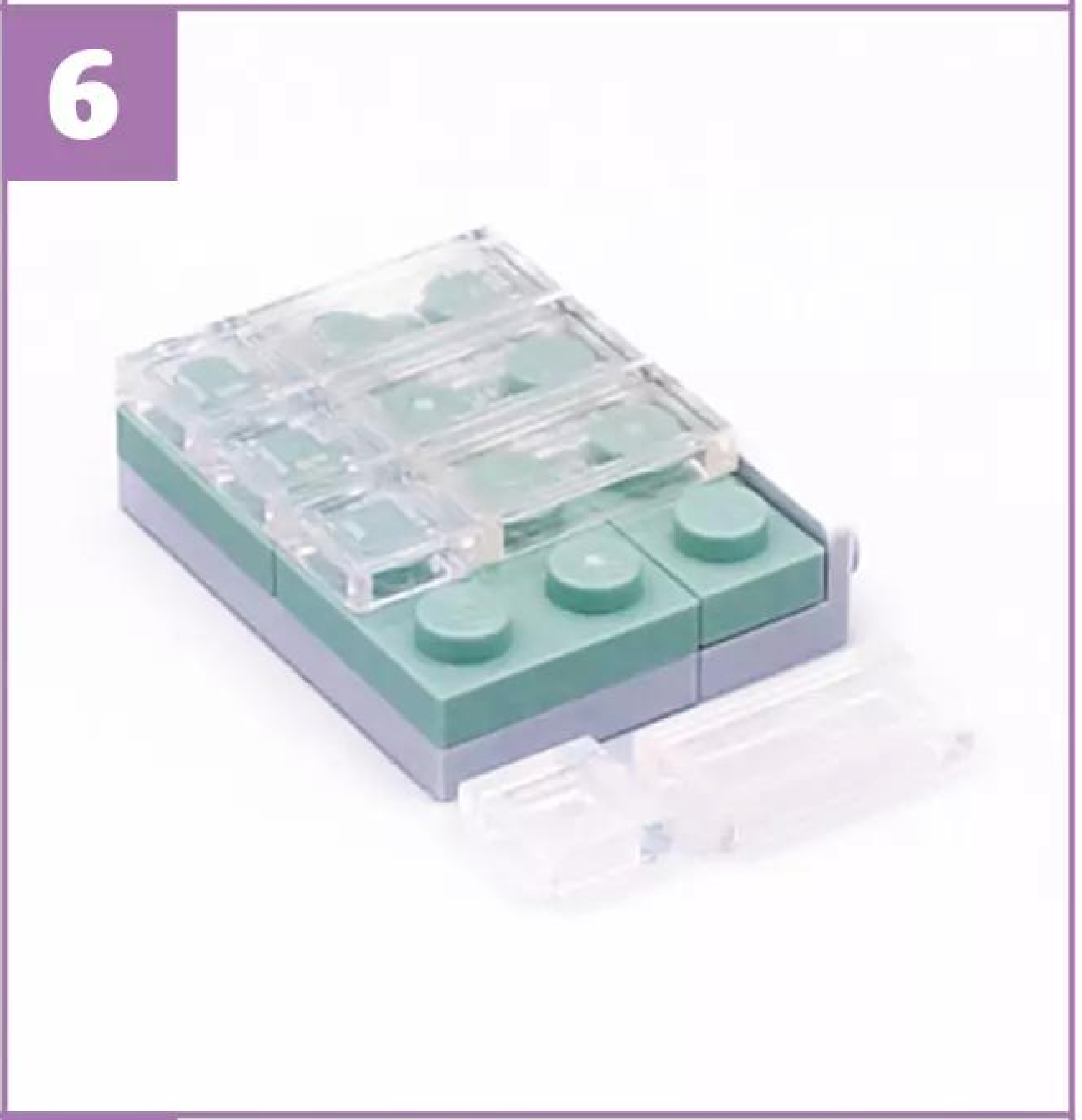

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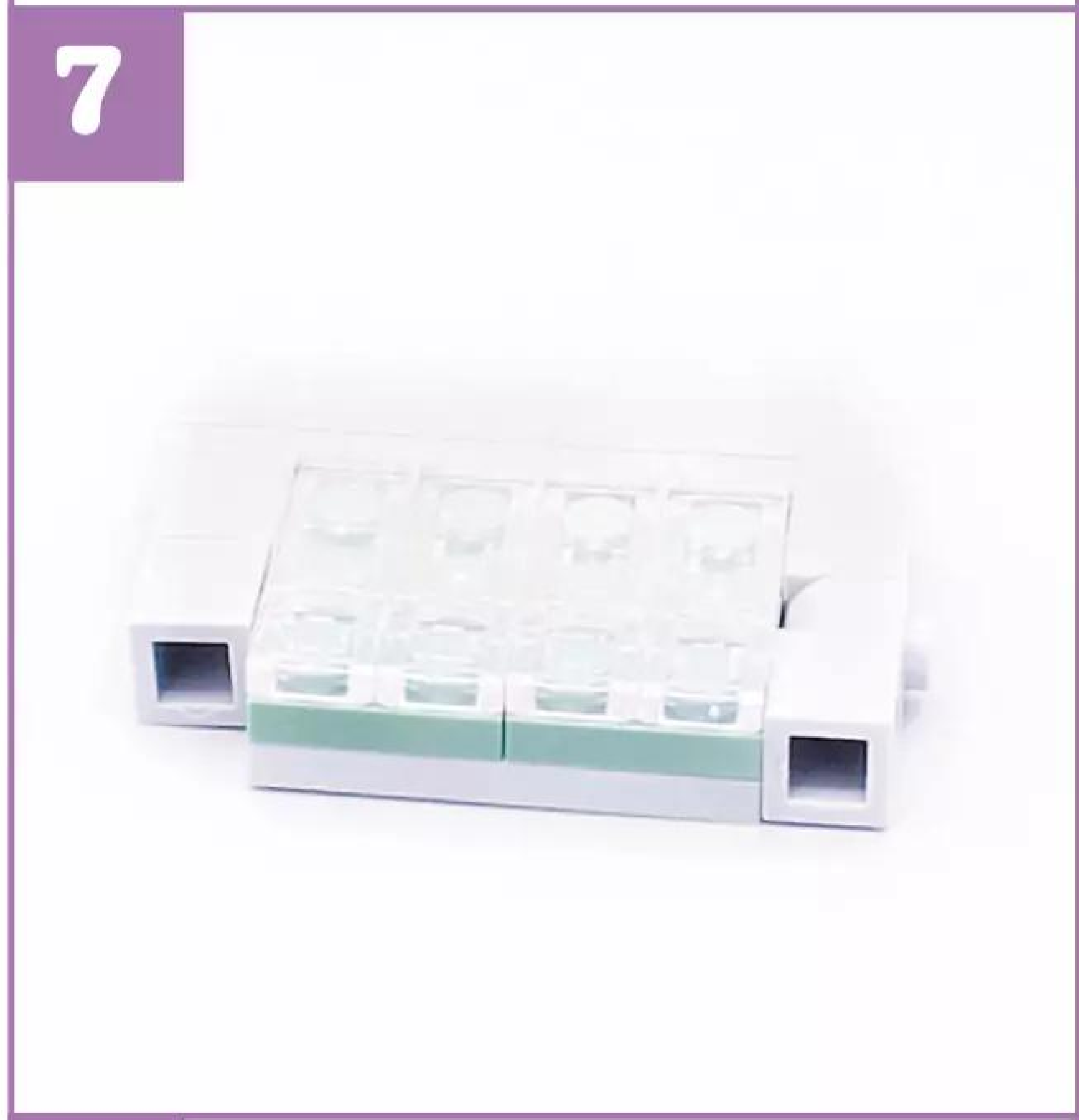

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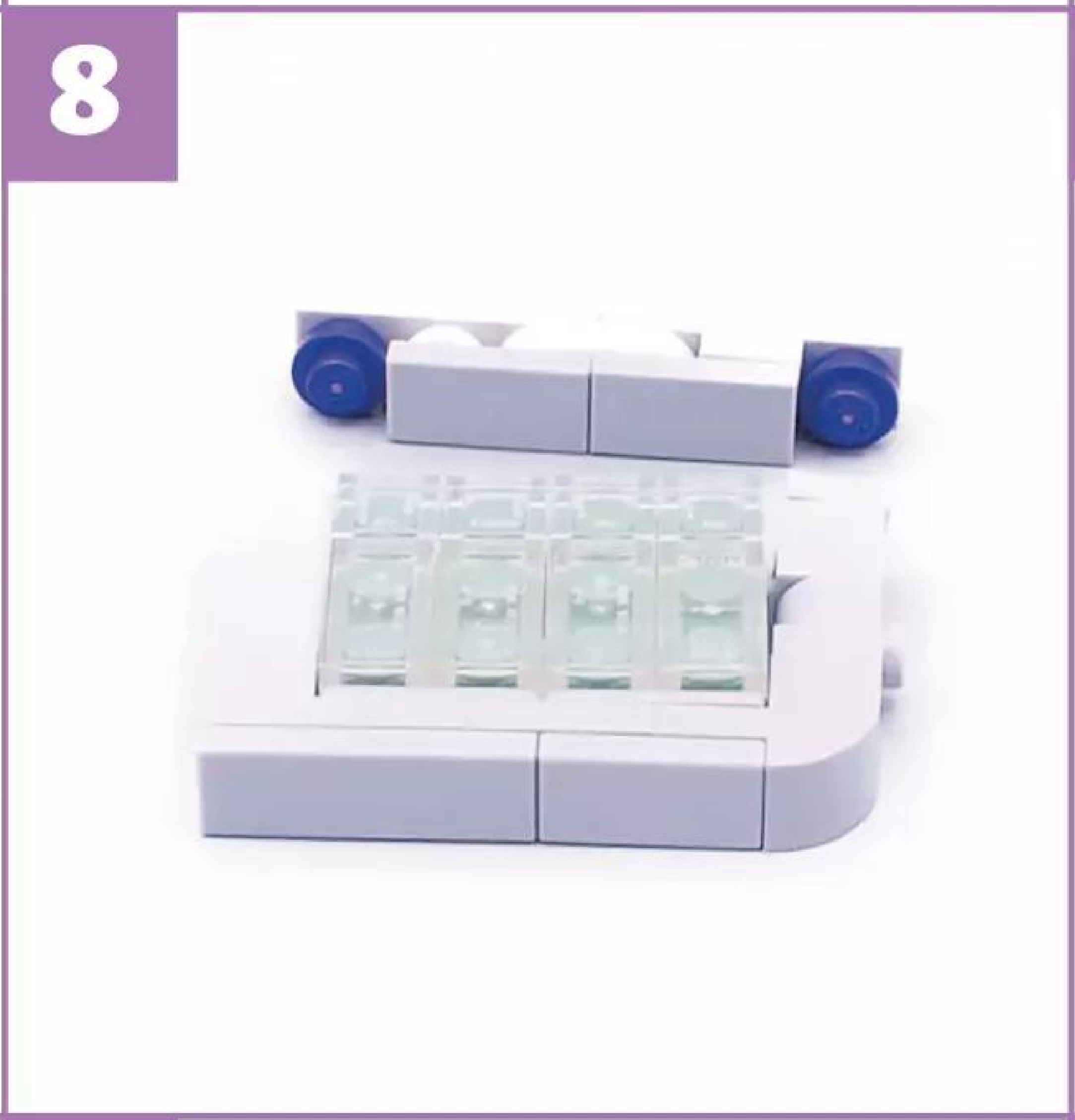

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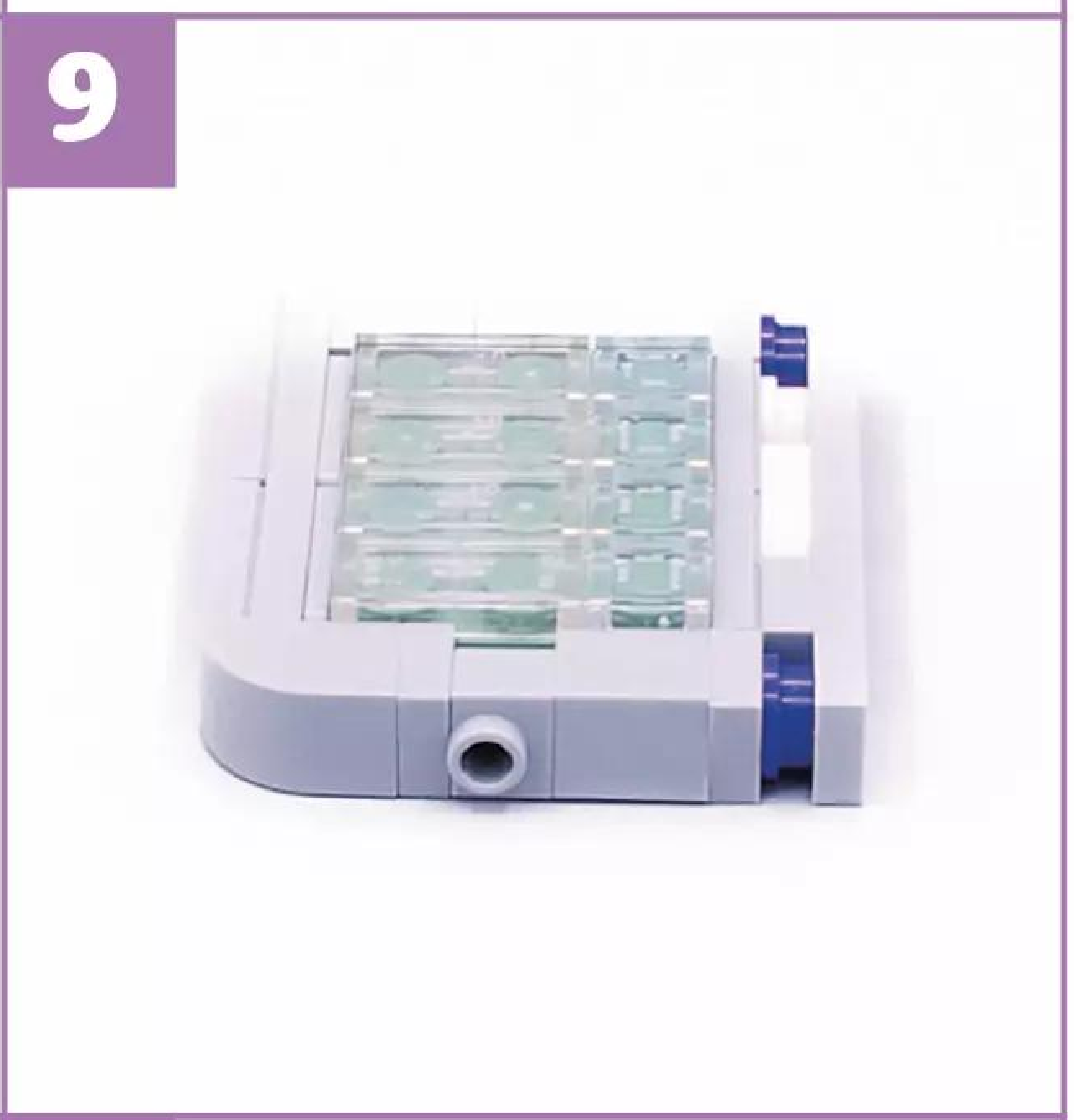

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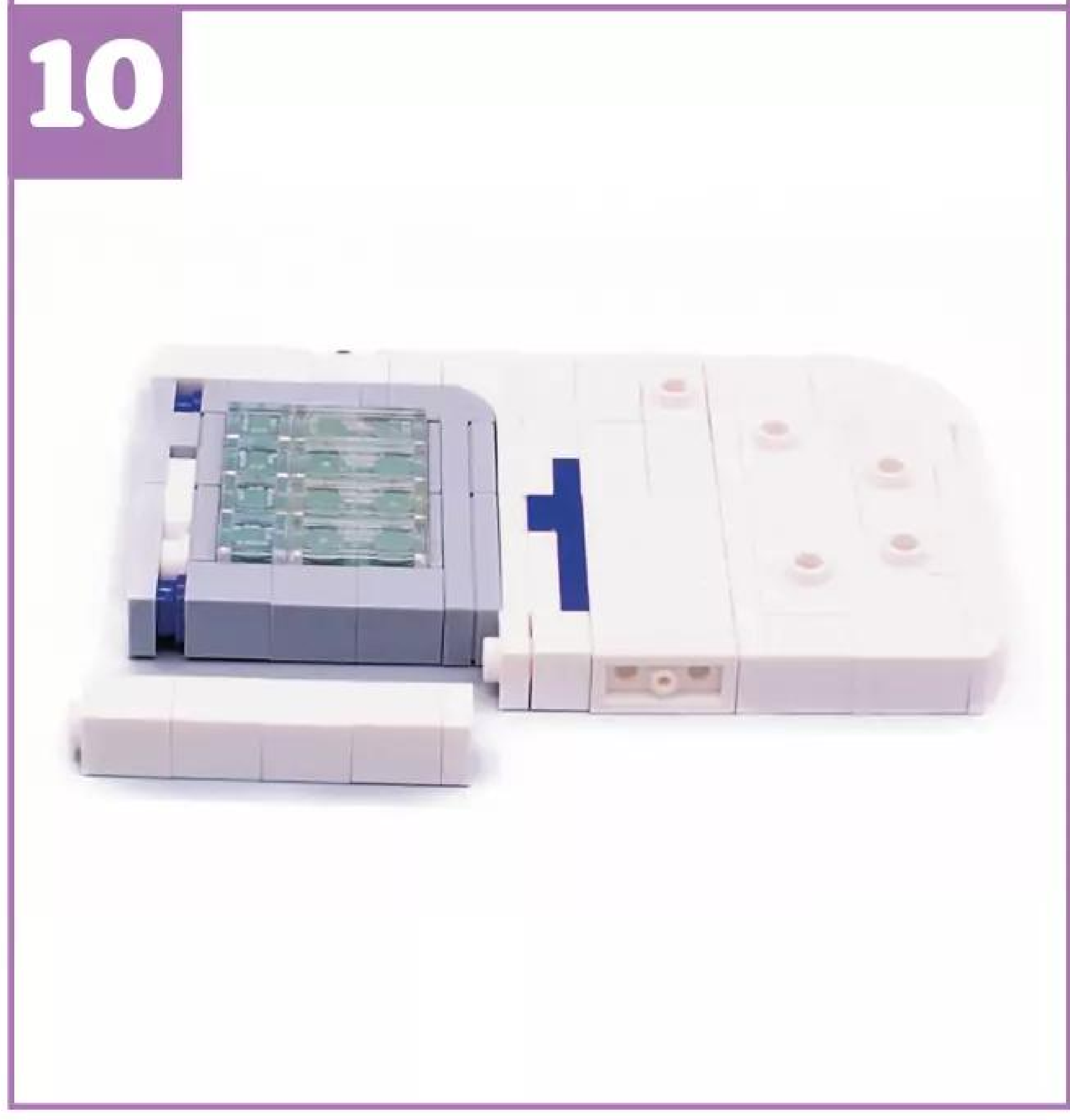

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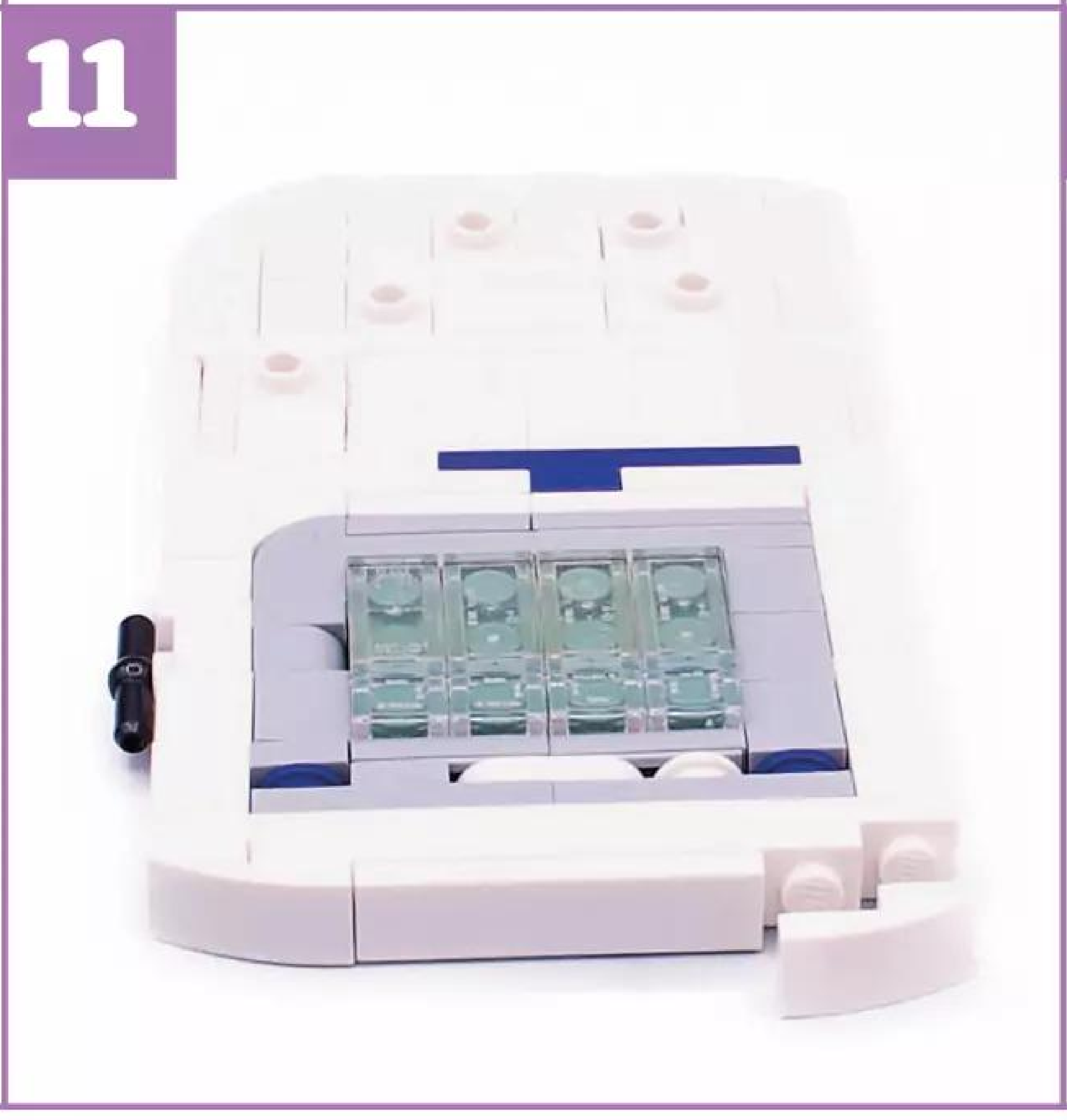

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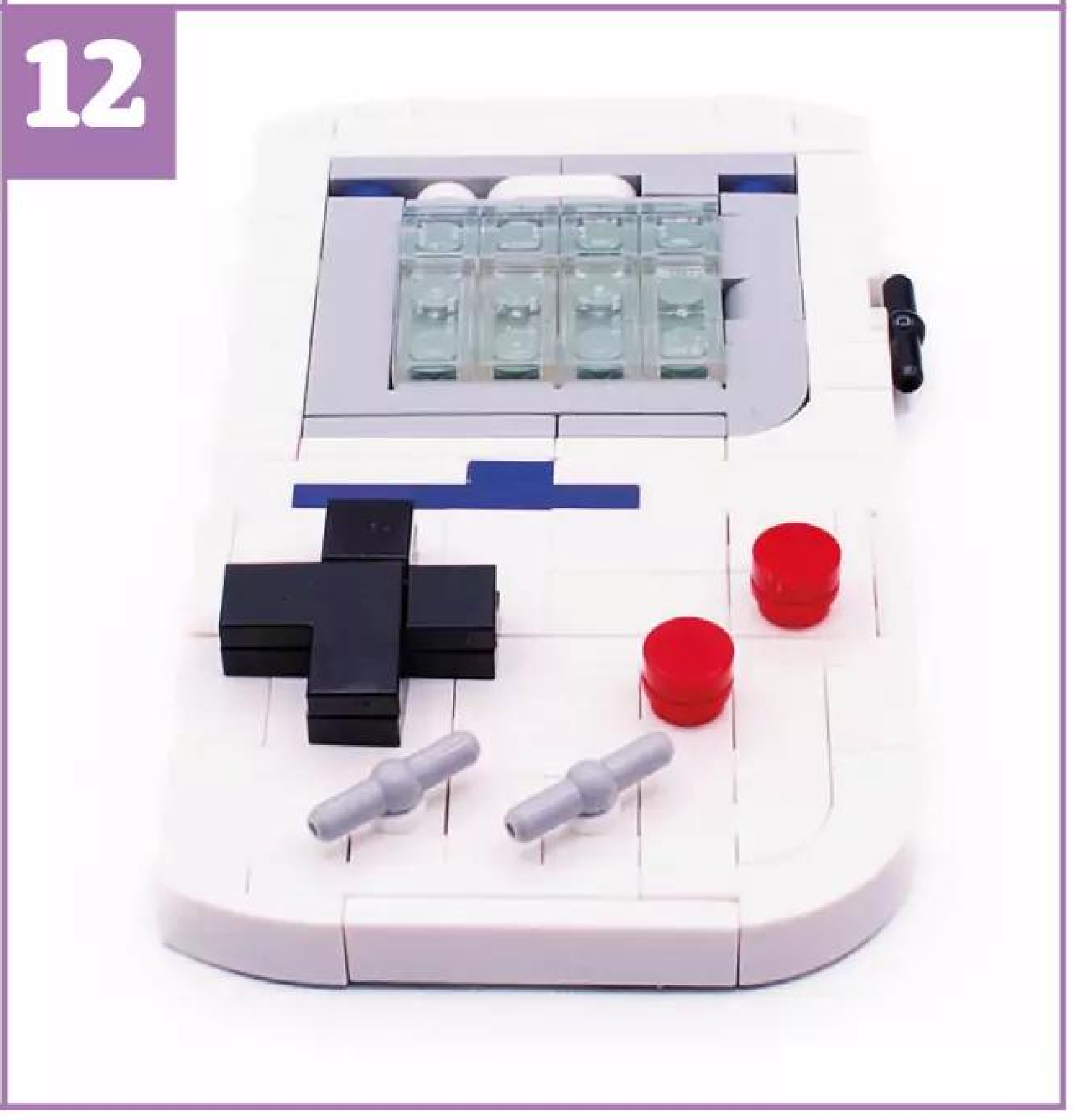


MY LEGO MASTERS JR. JOURNEY

Will Tachick's earliest LEGO experience was with Black Falcon's Fortress at four years old – little did he know that it would eventually lead him to the set of LEGO Masters Jr., where he competed with other young builders to see who would take home the trophy. He reveals what it was like to be part of the epic brick contest and take his fandom to the next level

***Words:** Will Tachick*

Every LEGO fan has an 'origin story' set that sparked their passion. Mine wasn't a shiny new box from the toy store shelf but a vintage set that arrived by mail from my dad's cousin, Daniel Konstanski — yes, the name you recognise from the pages of this very magazine.

When I opened the box I discovered the classic 6074 Black Falcon's Fortress, which my dad had owned as a kid in the 1980s and later passed onto Daniel. At four years old, I could follow most of the instructions to build it independently. My dad was really proud – and I was hooked on LEGO bricks!

For me, the LEGO System has always been about more than just following instructions. It has been a catalyst that unleashed my imagination. By the age of six, I was creating MOCs of my own. I was raising and releasing monarch butterflies as a hobby at the time and my MOC of the monarch life cycle won a contest and was displayed at the Minnesota Science Museum. I dabbled in stop motion too, premiering a couple of brick films at my elementary school's annual film fest.

The real turning point came at the age of 11, when I displayed my first MOC at a convention – BrickFest Philadelphia. Daniel was building a massive Hogwarts Castle and asked me to add a Quidditch pitch. I got involved and built that section at a scale that would match up with his massive castle.

Participating in fun challenges (including blind builds and speed builds), meeting LEGO Masters contestants and winning a YFOL award convinced me I had found my passion. Since then, I've displayed MOCs at a dozen conventions across the country, always pushing myself to try new things, such as techniques for sculpting with bricks, adding Power Functions and experimenting with lighting. Right now, I'm working on a cool Clash Royale themed MOC, inspired by the hours my friends and I spend battling it out in the game.

Meanwhile, designing, photographing and submitting monthly mini builds to Blocks has been its own adventure. I was invited to contribute to the magazine after building a duck with a brick separator beak, a nod to LEGO founder Ole Kirk Kristiansen's famous wooden duck.

I've enjoyed the challenge of designing something clever in twelve steps or less. Often, I recreate newly released sets in miniature form or

OLE KIRK CHRISTIANSEN
COOL THINGS BUILT WITH LEGOS TODAY!!!

***Clockwise from top right:** Will's first ever LEGO set was 6074 Black Falcon's Fortress.*

Will and Crosby either side of their celebrity teammate, Andy Richter.

Will even made a school project about the life of Ole Kirk Kristiansen.

The young builder contributed to Daniel Konstanski's sprawling Hogwarts Castle layout.

***Opposite page:** As a Harry Potter fan, Will has built several Hogwarts Castle sets.*

modernise classic sets. It keeps me building consistently and gives me a creative outlet that fits into my busy life as a high schooler.

THE AUDITION PROCESS

Two years ago, my mom saw on Facebook that Fox was casting for the first ever season of LEGO Masters Jr. After watching the first few seasons of LEGO Masters and wishing children could compete, I applied on a whim that weekend.

My mom helped me fill out the lengthy application and film a video audition showcasing my passion for the brick, my fandom of the series, my basement LEGO workshop, some of my MOCs and my convention awards. Because Will Arnett hosted the show at the time, I wrapped up with: "I hope I can join you and share my love for LEGO. From one handsome Will to another, let's get our brick on!"

I figured hundreds of kids across the country were applying so I honestly never expected to hear back. But then my dad's phone rang. There was a casting person on the other end saying he loved my audition video and was interested in me as a potential contestant. What started as a total long shot suddenly became a real possibility.

Soon I found myself participating in Zoom interviews and timed build challenges. When the producers announced they wanted to cast partners, I literally walked next door to my good friend, Crosby Ehlenfeldt, and asked: "do you want to build LEGO on TV with me?" He said yes!

After more interviews and build challenges to see what we could do as a team, Crosby and I received the call we had been waiting for. We were official contestants on LEGO Masters Jr. and would begin filming in Atlanta in a couple of weeks. I couldn't wait to set foot on the floor of the build room and peek inside the famous brick pit.

ENTERING THE BUILD ROOM

When Crosby and I first stepped onto the LEGO Masters Jr. set, I felt like we had entered another universe, one made entirely of bricks. Mountains of colourful pieces stretched out before us in the brick pit, glowing under bright studio lights.

Six build tables stood in two parallel rows down a wide centre aisle, ready and waiting for contestants eager to get their brick on. Above them, giant piston-shaped LEGO brick-themed lights pumped up and down dramatically, like we were entering the heart of a cool LEGO brick powered machine.

At the centre of it all stood Kelly Osbourne, our host, framed by a dazzling Disney backdrop that teased our very first challenge. Her bright pink dress and purple hair complemented her sweet and bubbly personality as she quickly became our biggest cheerleader.

But the thing that really blew me away was the brick pit itself. Two huge, pinwheel-shaped towers of bins anchored the corners, filled with every basic brick you could imagine (2x2s, 2x4s, 2x6s, and so on) in every colour of the LEGO rainbow. Along the walls stretched endless drawers of bricks organised by type and size, including tiles, plates, SNOT bricks, modified bricks, slope bricks and more.

Theoretically, everything had its place, smallest on the left and largest on the right. But in reality, it was chaos trying to find things during the first Disney challenge before we had learned the brick pit layout. I spent more time than I wanted hunting for masonry bricks before giving up and moving on to something else, as the clock was ticking.

By the end of filming, I still hadn't mastered the layout. And even with that mind-blowing supply, certain rare parts and colours, like dark red, dark green or dark blue specialty bricks, were strangely absent. The brick pit was both inspiring and overwhelming, like staring into infinite creative potential and then realising you didn't have time to find the one piece you really needed.

BUILDING WITH OTHERS

The celebrity partner twist was a fun surprise. Until Kelly announced it on set, Crosby and I expected to compete as a duo. We were the first team to be paired up with a celebrity and were fortunate to get comedian and actor Andy Richter. We recognised Andy from his role as Mort in Madagascar and had seen him in the holiday classic Elf. He charmed us with his enthusiasm and encouragement, walking over in matching green and khaki with a big grin and confident, "oh, we will win! Right guys? Yeah!"

Building with Andy was a blast! From the start he jumped in feet first, eager to learn and quick to take direction, growing as a builder with each new challenge. Before long he was adding contributions that actually levelled up our builds. He added the details on the gothic columns in our Ravenclaw uncommon common room.

But Andy's biggest impact wasn't his building skills, it was his humour. He helped us loosen up and enjoy this once in a lifetime experience. With a well-timed joke for every situation, Andy's clever wit lightened the mood during stressful challenges when we were up against the clock and the other teams.

His share of good-natured 'trash talk' kept the other teams on their toes and our families laughed when he joked they would think we are just "three nice Midwestern boys when we're actually sharks, out to kill!" Andy brought out our personalities, made us laugh when we needed it most and helped us build stronger together. To this day, I'll argue we scored the best celebrity partner on the roster.

Even though LEGO Masters Jr. is a competition, the other contestants quickly went from strangers to friends. Initially, it was a little awkward standing in a room full of kids I had never met, all of us staring at each other like, "so... you build with LEGO bricks too?" But the ice broke once the cameras were rolling and we started building. Sure, television shows a few team squabbles here and there, but in reality, everyone was super nice.

Off set, we would do schoolwork together, grab lunch and dinner, or hang out and play video games at the hotel. Our dads took Ajak, Zak, Crosby and I to visit the Georgia Aquarium. Some of the other kids, like Stella and Ajay, also aspire to design for the LEGO Group and we've even collaborated on builds to display at national brick conventions. Two years later we all still text each other and have plans to reunite at Brickworld Chicago next summer. One of the best parts of the whole LEGO Masters Jr. experience was walking away with a new group of friends.

Competing on national television came with its own pressure. Cameras were everywhere – on the floor, in the walls, hovering over our tables, zooming through the brick pit and probably other places I was never aware of.

BRICKMASTERS

At first, the sea of cameras circling around us felt intimidating. I kept wondering how they were filming us from ten different angles without getting any other cameras in the shot. But once I started building, I got into the zone and mostly forgot that they were there. Having Crosby and Andy by my side helped, as did all the production staff who encouraged us to relax and be ourselves.

The most nerve-wracking part wasn't the cameras, though, it was the judging. Standing under the lights, anxiously waiting for the Brickmasters to call out the top and bottom teams was tense. Crosby and I would literally cross our fingers and pray we wouldn't land in the bottom two. The relief of hearing we'd made the top two in the Disney and Harry Potter challenges is something I'll never forget. And I can empathise with the teams who had to stand there and face elimination because we were in the bottom two ourselves during the Celebrity Stunt Double challenge.

Luckily, the people judging us made that part of the competition easier to handle. Meeting Brickmasters Amy Corbett and Boone Langston (also LEGO design professionals) was surreal after watching them on television for so many seasons. On our first day on set, Boone busted through the brick wall and struck a chord when he shared: "Being part of the LEGO Masters family has completely changed my life... and you never know, one of you might be one of our LEGO designers someday."

Amy entered with a wide smile and all the style and grace you see from her on screen. Together, they struck the perfect balance between critiquing and encouraging us. They weren't afraid to point out a flaw in our build, but they always paired it with something positive or a helpful suggestion.

When we were working on our Harry Potter build, Amy complemented our raven before challenging us to show magic in different ways and take advantage of the opportunity to have fun with the design. The Brickmasters' feedback pushed us to get better and their enthusiasm reminded us that this journey was supposed to be fun too.

Our host, Kelly Osbourne, brought her own positive energy to the set. She'd swing by our table during each build to cheer us on, having been in our shoes before herself. And she enlivened the set with her fun and silly antics, like racing her giant LEGO car across the floor or trying to convince Boone to build more trophies with a handful of yellow bricks. Off set we were able to spend time with all three of them and they were just as passionate about LEGO building and as approachable as they were on set.

DISNEY TOONTOWN

When Kelly announced the very first challenge, building a Disney-themed train ride, Crosby and I glanced at each other with nervous smiles. As kids we'd watched all the Disney animated films, but at 13 we'd kind of outgrown them and didn't consider ourselves to be superfans. While other teams had their hearts set on certain characters, we figured we'd just roll with whatever minifigures we ended up with.

> "I experienced the pressure of the title on the line combined with a bad case of builder's block."

We didn't expect Max and Zoe to grab the last two sets of minifigures during the scramble, which left Andy fuming in outrage! Ultimately, Max and Zoe kept Elsa and Anna, which left us with Mickey and Minnie's Toontown. Our strategy was to go wild with colour and story.

The hardest part of that initial challenge wasn't showcasing our creativity, it was navigating the brick pit for the first time. I wasted too many precious minutes hunting for light bluish grey masonry bricks before admitting defeat.

Andy became our secret weapon. Whenever the Brickmasters or Kelly strolled over to check on our progress, he'd crack jokes and keep them chatting while Crosby and I continued to hustle. When time ran out on the challenge, I looked around the room and worried our build might be too small compared to some of the other teams. Surprisingly, the judges announced our names for the top two along with Vincent and Hudon's Peter Pan build.

Our scrolling Toontown sign and use of motors and movement set us apart from the other teams. Boone even said: "that animated sign on your parade float is the first time we've ever seen it on LEGO Masters. It was brilliant!" Hearing the judges acknowledge that we had done something no adult team had ever done before on the show with the LEGO SPIKE Prime components was cool, especially since we hadn't used them before ourselves. Even though Vincent and Hudson rightfully snagged the win, that moment gave us confidence that we belonged on the show.

CELEBRITY STUNT DOUBLE

The second challenge involved building a stunt vehicle with a brick replica of our celebrity partner behind the wheel to launch up a ramp, fly across a chasm and land on the other side. The Brickmasters told us to make our LEGO celebrity stunt doubles really shine, so I immediately got to work sculpting Andy's face to be as expressive as possible, while Crosby and Andy engineered the vehicle.

Our idea was to create a fishing boat/car hybrid we called The S.S. Andy or, as Andy kept insisting, 'the Sssssssandy.' We decked it out with rods, flapping fish and even a live well full of translucent blue 'water' and LEGO fish that were supposed to splash everywhere as it made the jump.

We received positive feedback from the Brickmasters prelaunch and were feeling great about our build when it came to creativity, looks and storytelling. But then came the moment of truth... the launch. As we wheeled our build onto the ramp, LEGO Andy's head popped off and my stomach dropped. I scrambled to reattach it but when we hit the launch button, LEGO Andy didn't make the jump with the rest of the fishing boat.

Watching him tumble out as the boat sailed to the finish was both hilarious and horrifying. Sure enough, we landed in the bottom two with Max and Zoe. The anxiety of standing under those hot lights, wondering if we'd be sent home, was tough but also motivating. While it was sad to say goodbye to a great team, we thankfully survived that elimination and it lit a fire in us to return to the top in the next challenge.

HARRY POTTER RAVENCLAW

The third challenge was made for us – we had to build a Harry Potter uncommon common room. Crosby and I are lifelong fans of the series, having read the books and seen the films multiple times. I've been building the LEGO sets for years and contributed to a massive, award-winning Harry Potter MOC with Daniel, so I was filled with excitement

when we heard the rules.

Each team's celebrity was sorted into a Hogwarts house by the LEGO Sorting Hat. Lots of teams were hoping for the classic brave and daring Gryffindor, the house of Harry, Ron and Hermione. We ended up with Ravenclaw, which was perfect. When Andy asked what that meant, I told him they were "basically nerds."

We started by designing a raven sculpture with widespread wings for the centrepiece, along with towering pillars, bookshelves and reading tables, plus spell-casting stations. Then we uncovered a handful of pixie minifigures in our parts bin and the inspiration struck for 'pixie pandemonium.'

Our story was that the Ravenclaw common room had been overrun by wild Cornish pixies, zipping around and wreaking magical havoc. Our minifigures were using the magic of our favourite things to capture the pixies and return them to their chests. The whole scene came to life with blue studs for pixie dust effects, books flying off shelves, wands misfiring and lots of whirling movement using motors and translucent bricks. Andy impressed us by crafting detailed gothic pillars that really tied the room together.

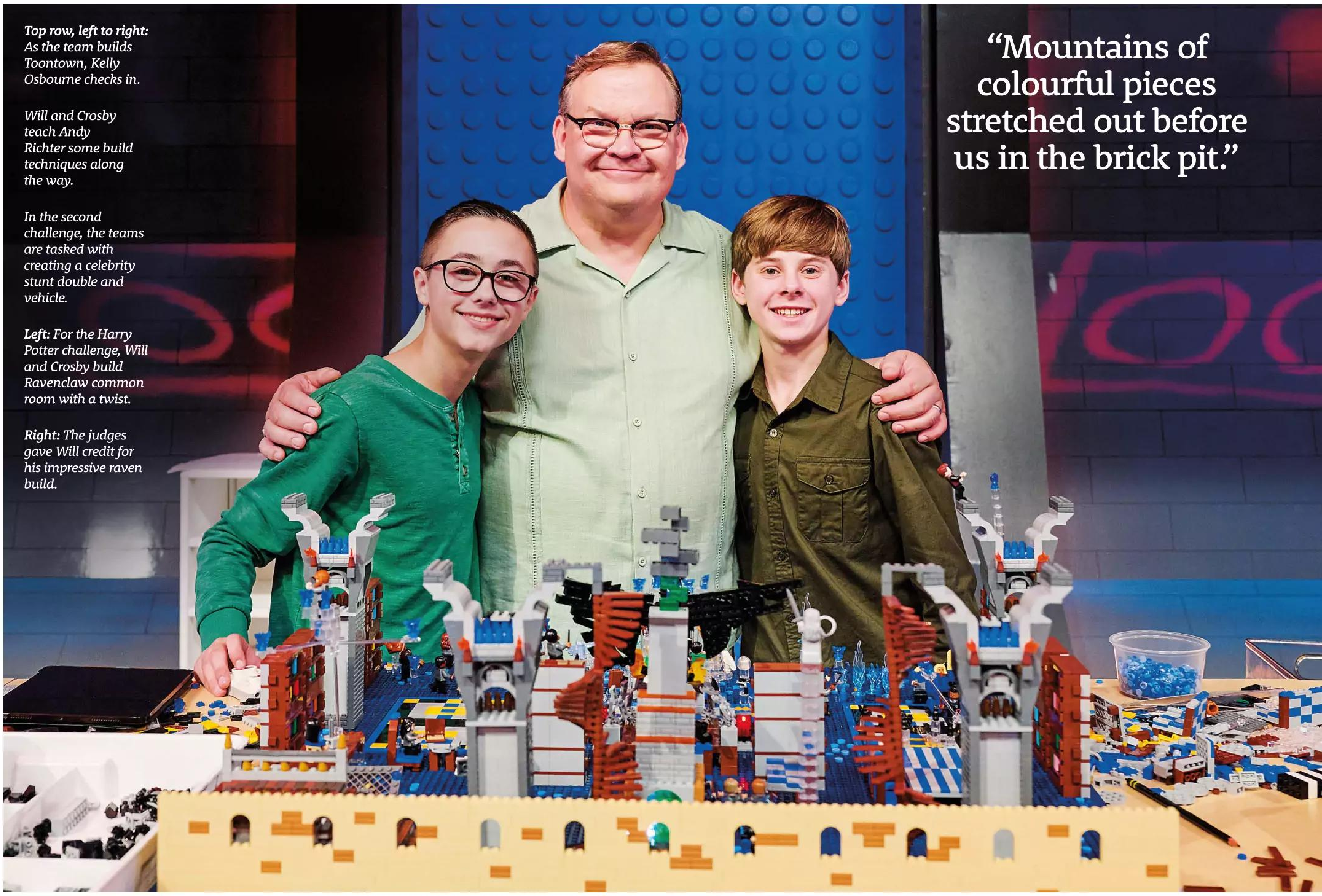
Come judging time, our nerves from the previous episode turned into confidence and we made it back to the top two. The Brickmasters praised our imaginative storytelling, our spinning Power Functions and our attention to detail. Amy told us: "the real standout for me is this raven. It is so beautifully built. Many of the adults can't build animals as well as that so I'm definitely very, very impressed!"

We were sure we'd finally snag a win and were most worried about the competition from Stella and Chelle's Slytherin build. Instead, we came in second again, this time to Ajay and Zak and the multiple Power Functions in their Gryffindor uncommon common room. We were disappointed because we felt this was our strongest build and that we'd really cooked up something worthy of first place. But after having to say goodbye to another great team in Vincent and Hudson, we were grateful just to have made the finale.

NINJAGO DRAGON

The finale challenge theme, NINJAGO, hit us like a lightning bolt. I had some experience sculpting dragons and immediately claimed Nya, Master of Water, for our elemental character. Growing up watching NINJAGO I liked the water dragons the most and honestly just wanted the chance to build a blue dragon. Blue is one of my favourite colours, especially in the LEGO System.

But then the reality of the six-hour time limit set in. I experienced the



Top row, left to right: *As the team builds Toontown, Kelly Osbourne checks in.*

Will and Crosby teach Andy Richter some build techniques along the way.

In the second challenge, the teams are tasked with creating a celebrity stunt double and vehicle.

Left: *For the Harry Potter challenge, Will and Crosby build Ravenclaw common room with a twist.*

Right: *The judges gave Will credit for his impressive raven build.*

> "Mountains of colourful pieces stretched out before us in the brick pit."

pressure of the championship title on the line combined with a bad case of builder's block. It wasn't just a win; it was the win. For 30 agonising minutes I fiddled with pieces like ball joints and angular plates, unable to crack the dragon head design.

Finally, an idea clicked and I was able to sculpt an angular head with translucent blue accents and rounded scales going down a curved neck. However, looking around the room at our competitors' builds, I noticed our dragon was the smallest. And if experience tells us anything, size often wins on LEGO Masters.

It was too late in the game to try to take the dragon apart to scale up the size. We needed to pivot. That's when we came up with the idea of making a two-headed dragon, which we named Steambert and Steama. Suddenly, our weakness became the thing that set us apart. While I built scales, wings and the twin head, Crosby and Andy continued work on our coastal city under siege, complete with crashing waves and Imperial forces. Our dragon looked ferocious riding the wave and towering above the minifigures. We even added a steam-breathing effect that cloaked the city in mist during judging. It looked super epic.

> "Andy helped us loosen up and enjoy this once in a lifetime experience."

Even though I was proud of what we accomplished in the short time period, my nerves were off the charts standing through the final judging. The Brickmasters praised the sculpting and believability of our dragon but suggested the scale and placement in the build could have been more prominent. Boone told us: "those ninja swirling around in the steam really came to life." We knew it would be close.

After what felt like hours of suspense, they crowned Ajay and Zak the first-ever LEGO Masters Jr. champions, awarding them the massive trophy and $50,000 cash prize. At first I was crushed, but then Kelly announced that the runners up would receive a trip to LEGO headquarters in Billund, Denmark. Suddenly, the sting of our loss was gone. It has been a dream of mine to visit Billund and LEGO House. I realised that beyond trophies and cash and titles, what I had gained from this experience was priceless. New friends, improved skills, incredible memories and the confidence to dream about becoming a LEGO designer someday.

WHAT'S NEXT

In the end, LEGO Masters Jr. changed me and my builds. I picked up new techniques, learned to think differently about mechanics and even figured out new measurement tricks with bricks. But the biggest change was personal. The show gave me more confidence to speak up, meet new people and put myself out there. Since then, I've been pushing my creativity even further.

Crosby and I are going big for Brickworld Chicago 2026 with a Clash Royale themed MOC that will stretch across around 28 baseplates. I've been busy sculpting all the characters and planning for the layout. It's ambitious, but we want to make the characters move around to battle it out, just like in the game we spend too many hours playing together.

I'm also expanding my medieval Black Falcon Fortress-inspired castle, designing monthly mini builds for Blocks and working with my local LUG on a giant mechanical tree. Every project pushes me to experiment with movement, lighting and techniques I never knew were possible when I was a four-year-old staring at my first LEGO set. If LEGO Masters Jr. taught me anything, it's that LEGO bricks are so much more than a toy. They are a way to keep growing, imagining and connecting with people who enjoy building as much as I do.

Looking ahead, my LEGO journey still feels like it's only just beginning. My ultimate dream is to design sets for the LEGO Group someday. Can you imagine walking into LEGO headquarters each morning, sitting down with designers like Boone, Amy and Jamie Berard to create the sets children will unwrap on birthdays and holidays? That's a dream worth chasing.

But even if I don't end up as a professional designer, I just want to keep building. LEGO bricks have taken me from my basement workshop, to conventions across the country, to the LEGO Masters TV studio in Atlanta and to Billund where it all began almost a century ago. Wherever this brick-built path leads, I know I'll carry with me the sense of wonder and creativity that hooked me with my very first set. At the end of the day, the LEGO hobby isn't just something I do – it's part of who I am.

Top row, left to right: *The team collaborates on their NINJAGO scene.*

Will works on his LEGO brick depiction of Andy Richter.

Kelly Osbourne stops by to see how things are progressing.

Crosby teamed up with Will for LEGO Masters Jr.

Far left: *Talented design professionals Jme Wheeler and Jamie Berard met up with Will and Crosby when they visited Billund.*

Left: *Will has big plans for future convention displays.*

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Family Christmas Tree Decoration

The largest LEGO Christmas tree yet aims to be a holly jolly festive centrepiece suitable for both play and display

There have been many LEGO Christmas trees through the years – a few standalone models and many more as part of larger scenes. Winter Village Collection sets in particular have demonstrated the many different ways that you can put a decorated fir tree together.

To push the part count from a few hundred pieces to a few thousand though (and to increase the price accordingly) it needs to do something special and unique. Bigger is of course part of the equation – but bigger alone isn't enough.

In order to justify a Christmas tree of this scale and to ensure it's not 3,000 parts of foliage tedium, the designers have built a miniature world inside the green exterior. There are two floors (each with two distinct sides) that tell a story of Santa's Christmas operation. At the top there's the Santa computer, clearly the control room of the operation, then further down there's a kitchen and canteen for the elves. The opposite side features the essential workshop and a chill out room full of arcade machines (the stickers for which are fantastic).

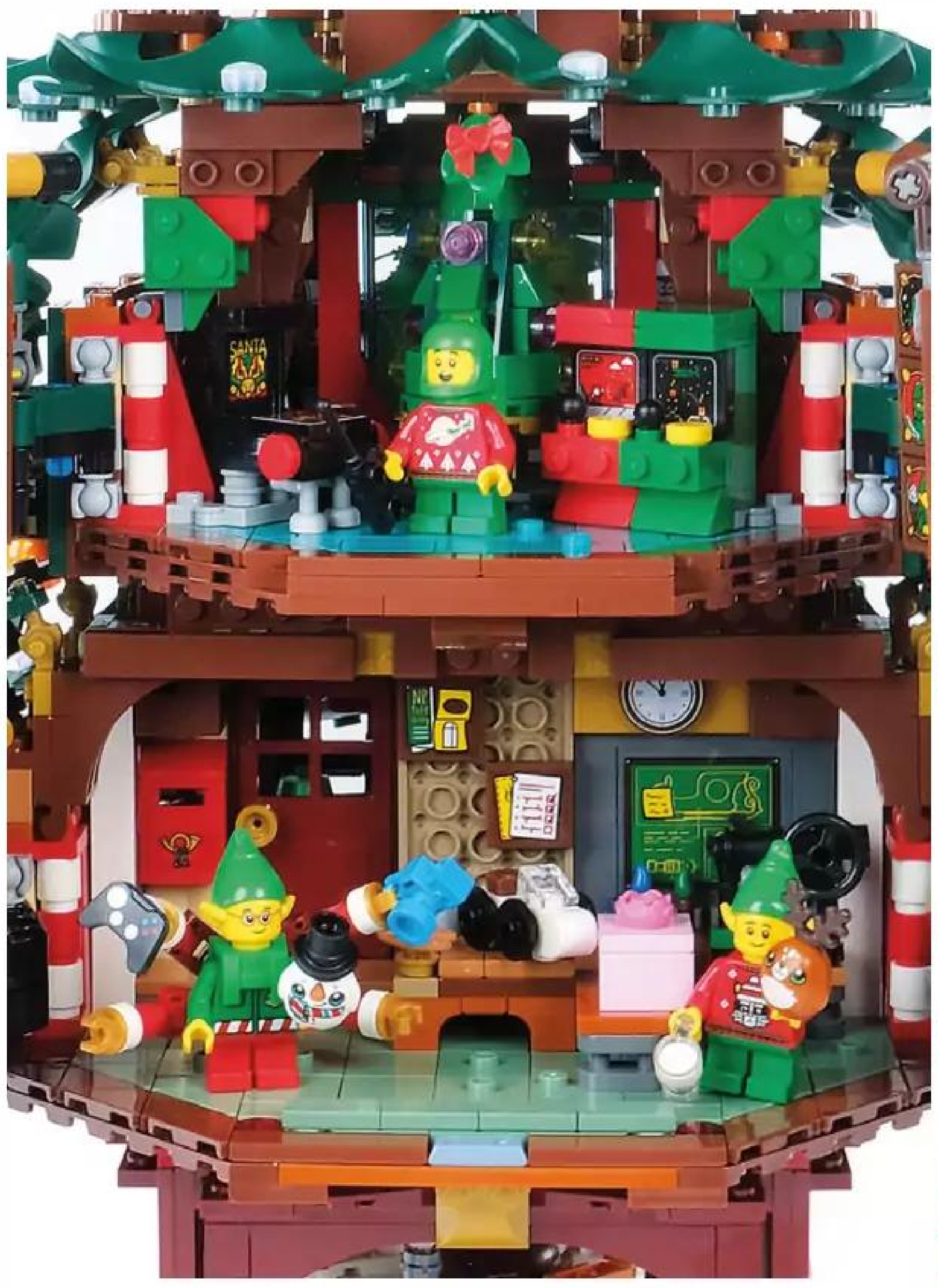
Those areas are very enjoyable to build, as they are where most of the micro models and amusing touches are found. They are part of a varied construction process though. It begins with a rigid central structure, which is very impressive. The model is built in a modular way, yet when you place the higher levels on top of the lower ones, clips are used to lock the sections together to ensure that the entire thing is completely solid.

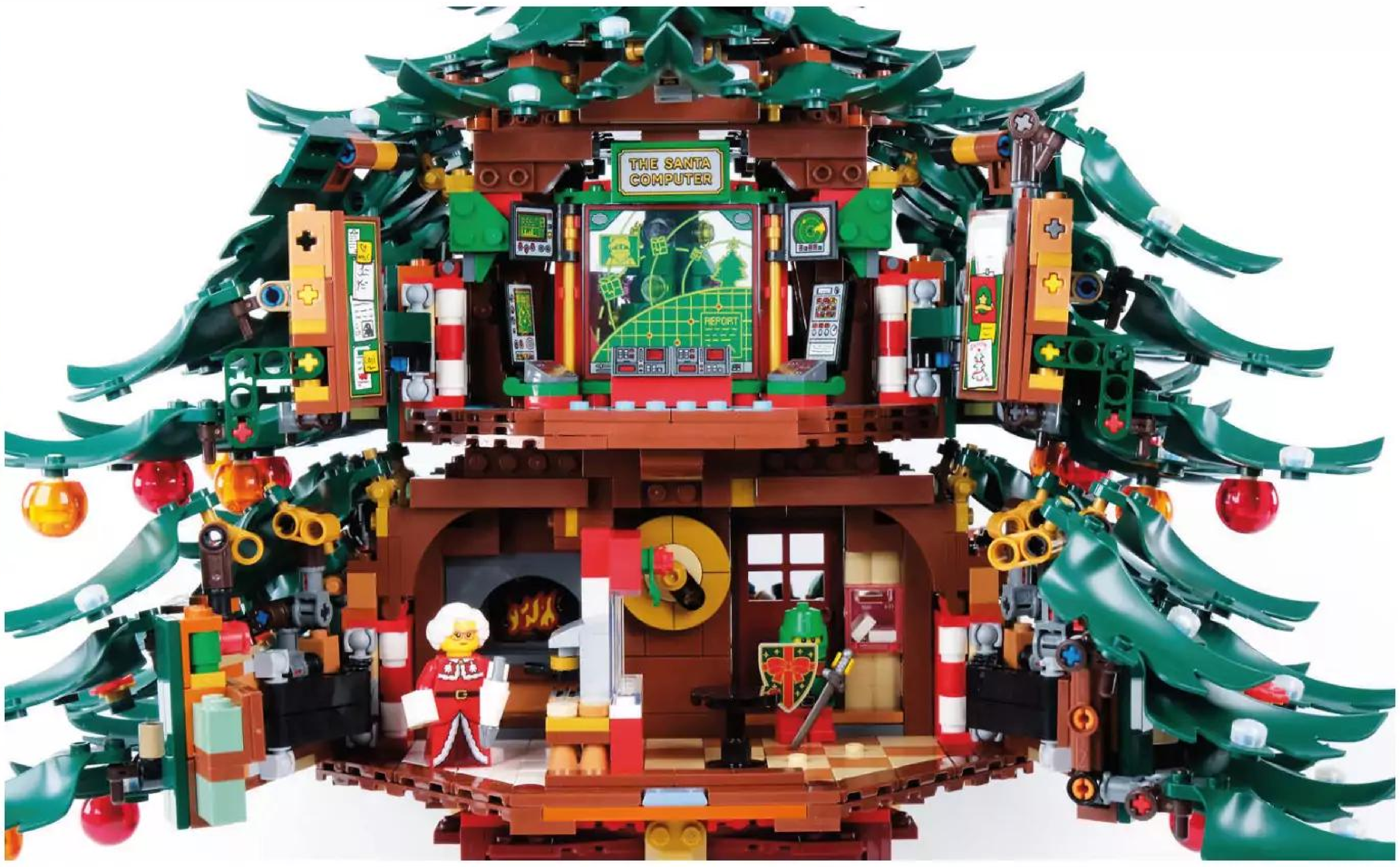
Besides the core structure and minifigure scale rooms, there are lots and lots of leaf pieces to place. The new element features 96 times in the model and it's easy to imagine how it might have utility beyond this set. The cleverest use is at the very top of the tree, where the top two layers are intricately overlapped for a really pleasing look. Elsewhere they are not locked, so just like a real fake Christmas tree, you'll need to keep repositioning them.

This model is being sold as a family 'Build Together' model, but it's not apparent that this is the most suitable set for a family who presumably have different levels of skill. When constructing the sections that form the doors that allow you to peek inside the model, you use a lot of Technic elements and it requires a bit of attention to get right. It's fine for an experienced builder, but not part of the model you'd want to let your new-to-the-brick grandma tackle.

41843 might also intimidate family members when it comes to getting to the interior. Once complete, it's quite finickity to find the doors and open them – again, adult fans will have no issue, but the children who are likely to want to play with Santa's secret world will probably knock a bunch of leaf elements off as they access it.

10361 Holiday Express Train might actually be a more suitable set for families – it is built in sections, it's very approachable and children are unlikely to do any damage when playing with it. For an adult fan though, 41843 Family Christmas Tree Decoration is the more substantial build.





The inclusion of Cataclaws in the set is not just odd, it's irritating. If the LEGO Group's marketing people want to come up with something gimmicky and claim surveyed children want a cat to deliver their Christmas presents, that's one thing… but actually putting it into a special festive model? That sort of nonsense should be left to promotional materials that can be ignored, not immortalised in the products that Cataclaws was created to sell.

Fortunately the rest of the characters are very much welcome and feel as if they were lovingly crafted. Given the storyline, Santa Claus and Mrs Claus are essential – but they have appeared many times before. Things get interesting when it comes to the elves – one of them has a Christmas tree emblem on her outfit to reference the set.

The best torso is probably the elf with the Classic Space inspired holiday sweater. The logo has been adapted to feature Santa's sleigh and it looks fabulous. The knight elf is great too, with a subtle torso and much less subtle gift-wrapped shield. Unfortunately, the remaining elf has a Cataclaws Christmas jumper… apparently there's no escaping the modern mascot's claws.

As a display piece, this really is striking. If you want a LEGO Christmas tree to be a statement decoration, this is the one to build. The play aspect is surprising and whimsical, with some very nice humour threaded throughout Santa's secret world.

With so many expensive LEGO sets to choose from, it's unlikely that a massive Christmas tree is at the top of your wish list. If you are one of those people though who looks forward to the season every year and adores decorating for the holiday, then this set is well worth the investment – it's incredibly rewarding to build, it looks great on display and it puts a fun twist on Santa's world.

GRAHAM E. HANCOCK

Verdict 80 **This set is more than a lush, sizable LEGO Christmas tree for display – it is one of the most humourus takes on Father Christmas and his world ever built.**

Left: *Recoloured minifigure helmets are baubles on the tree.*

Opposite page, clockwise from top left: *It only takes one reindeer to pull this mini sleigh.*

Cataclaws was introduced in 2024 as part of the LEGO Group's Christmas marketing campaign.

The control room is located above the dining hall.

Inside the tree there's an arcade and a workshop.

10361

Theme: Icons / **Price:** £109.99, $129.99, €119.99 /
Recommended age: 18+ / **Pieces:** 956 / **Minifigures:** 4

Holiday Express Train

Will a ride on this festive locomotive put you in the mood for singing classic songs and celebrating the season?

Steam engines are an iconic part the Christmas season. Whether it's a special trip through snow-covered countryside or travelling home to see family, such trains symbolise a romanticised, nostalgia-soaked idea of festivities from a bygone era. When the LEGO Group started to market holiday sets to adults in 2006, it was with 10173 Holiday Train.

That was followed up by 10254 Winter Holiday Train in 2016 and now, almost another decade later, LEGO Icons is adding 10361 Holiday Express Train to the Winter Village Collection.

Where 10361 is similar to those previous steam engines is in the fairly simple build method. Winter Village sets are often intricate, involved models, with decent part counts – but that's not as true when it comes to the trains, which are fairly straightforward to build and 10361 is suitable for much younger fans than the 18+ age mark suggests.

The smaller, simple approach is partly because of how expensive train track elements are, which are included with the set. As they take up a chunk of the budget and space in the box, the model must be modest in size. It's also unlikely that Christmas fiends want a massive, complex steam engine to put together – most festive fans are looking for something to run around the tree or weave through Winter Village buildings.

So the straightforward build is in keeping with what has come before. It's still enjoyable, with each section built quite differently – the polar bear is about the mechanism and the shaping, while the passenger carriage is about classic squared off construction. The engine itself is the most enjoyable section to construct.

10361 Holiday Express Train significantly differs from its predecessors though. Both of those sets are a deep green with red and black accents. The design team has opted for an icy blue colour scheme with gold accents this time and it looks great. It's not as traditional as the green, but something new is very welcome.

It's not just the hues that have changed. Where 10254 Winter Holiday Train feels somewhat ornate, 10361 has a cute, cartoony feel, perhaps inspired by Japanese culture. The polar bear and bow-wrapped carriage both have this vibe, but even the simple shapes of the engine itself contribute to that aesthetic. It works very well for this particular set, giving it a unique style, but perhaps limits its utility within a wider Winter Village layout.

The functions are neat – the steam moving up and down is really cool and the polar bear looks amusing as it rings the bell. These nice touches give this set has an appropriate 'toy train' aspect.

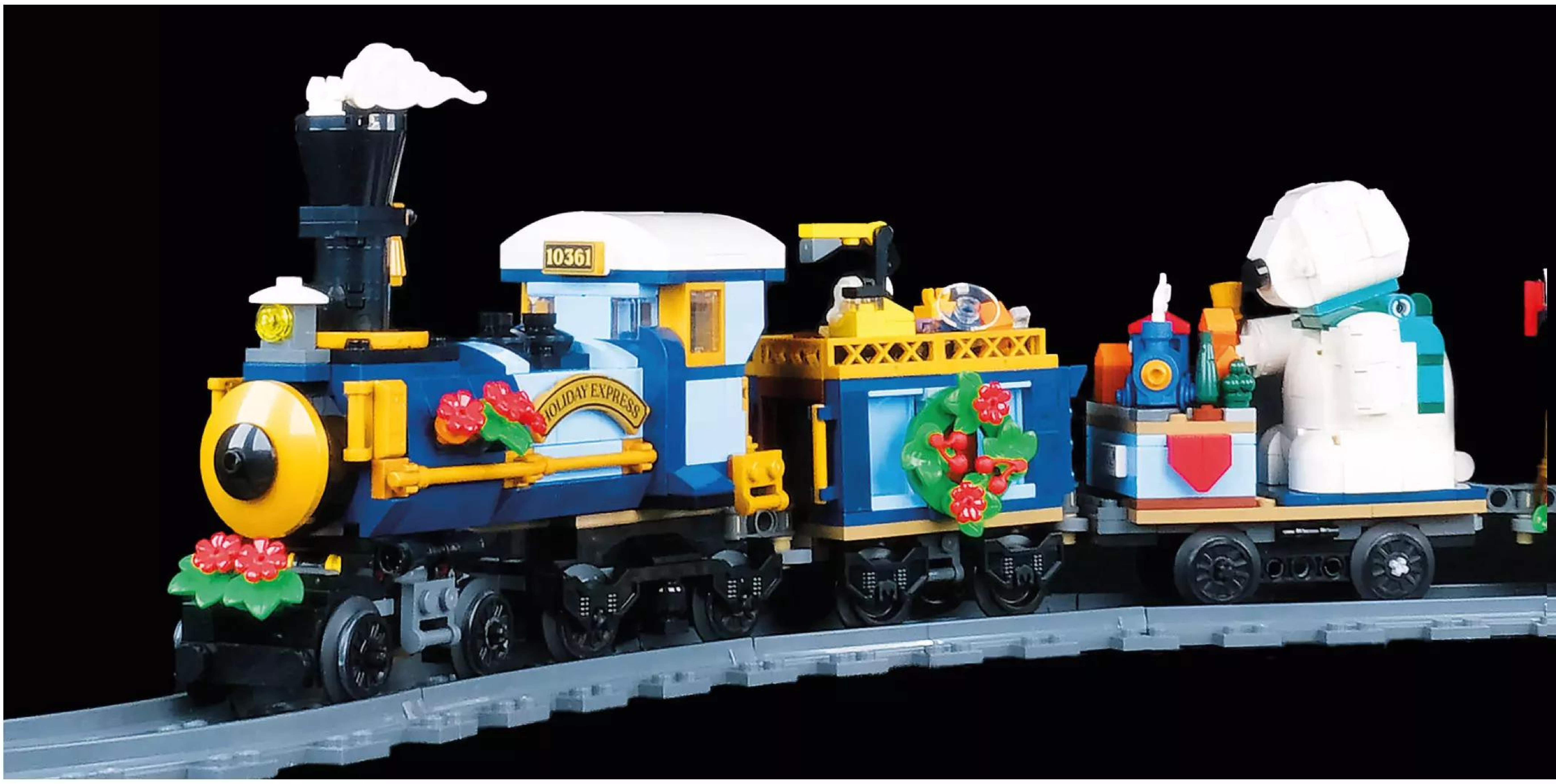
One of the big surprises in this set is the first additive manufactured – or 3D printed – element in a mass release box. It's an intriguing element, a mini version of the larger engine, with a function built in; when you roll it along, a plume of steam moves up and down (again, like the larger model).

It's a fun oddity but the limitations of such elements are apparent – clearly the required clutch power isn't possible, as it only features bar connectors. When placed onto the micro town model in the set, it is completely out of scale, towering over the buildings around it. The preformed nature of it also feels at odds with the notion of the LEGO System.

The four minifigures are all solid, with the two passengers intended to represent the children from the 2016 set, now grown-up adults. There's something more exciting than the minifigures when you open the box up though – the realisation that there is no label sheet in this one, instead only printed pieces.

Motorising the set is really straightforward, which is great – train fans might enjoy getting their engines moving through their own ingenuity, but tinsel-philes just want the model to get going as quickly as possible. It pairs well with 41843 Family Christmas Tree Decoration once you have it running around the loop of track for an effective display.

10361 is a difficult set to assess; it is visually attractive and it has a real charm to it. The more you look at it though, the more incongruous it feels. It is carrying gifts, passengers… a giant polar bear mascot and a tiny

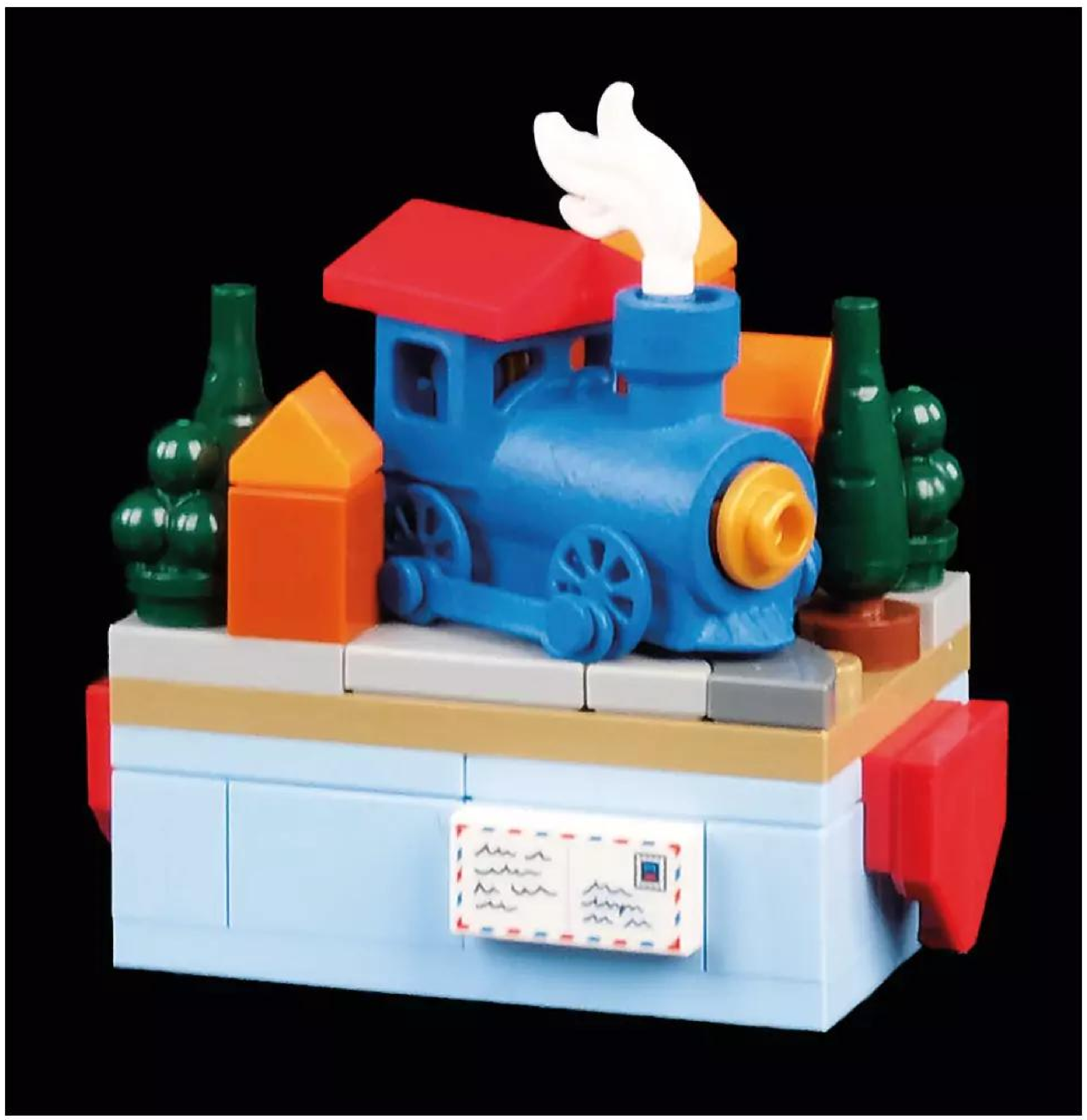


model town. There's not enough connection between these disparate elements. While 10254 Winter Holiday Train has a fanciful rotating Christmas tree, its relevance is more apparent than the imaginative aspects of this locomotive.

In spite of that, Christmas is a time for LEGO building and if your budget permits you to add this set to your collection, you can probably overlook its flaws and enjoy it for what it is – especially if the colour scheme appeals. If you're being selective when it comes to your festive sets though, this is not an essential addition to your display.

GRAHAM E. HANCOCK

Verdict
65
The clean aesthetic works well and the set is easy to motorise, but the different cars are quite disjointed and the mini train element feels like a gimmick.



Left: *All decorations on the Holiday Express are printed.*

Above: *There are a collection of gifts on the coal car.*

Right: *There's a small town to place the special train in.*

Below right: *The functional polar bear and the wrapped-up dining car.*

40820

Theme: *Seasonal* / ***Price:*** *£46.99, $54.99, €54.99* /
Recommended age: *10+* / ***Pieces:*** *761* / ***Minifigures:*** *0*

Up-Scaled Santa Minifigure

It's funny to think that the current version of LEGO Santa Claus has been around for 13 years. Those of a certain vintage will recall the classic Santa minifigure, who borrowed a pirate hat and Majisto's beard to convey jolly old Saint Nic. Collectible Minifigures changed all that though by introducing the bespoke hat and beard, which have been a mainstay of Father Christmas minifigures ever since.

Naturally, 40820 Up-Scaled Santa Minifigure is based on the modern version. The LEGO Group has been somewhat restrained when it comes to these big, brick-built minifigures. 76393 Harry Potter & Hermione Granger was the first set in 2021 and three more have followed since. By staying close to the original, excellent template, they have been consistently solid sets.

The build method is intriguing and fun. You start with the torso, which uses a few impressive tricks to get the correct shape and feels nicely solid when complete. It's also a joy to build the arms and get the unique angle that you find on actual minifigures.

In a sophisticated touch, the hips are built in the opposite direction to the main body and then attached. The legs are then built separately and attached so that they have authentic articulation.

Santa makes for good subject matter. He's an icon and now an iconic minifigure too. There are some interesting aspects to his minifigure, such as the black boots, which make building the set a little more interesting than some of the previous large minifigures.

The biggest points of difference though are those bespoke elements. The hat has a clever construction with some sideways building and a neat method of attaching the ball, then connects to the head on a bar so that it gets the nice angle that looks just right.

Putting the beard together with multi-directional building and dozens of slope pieces is even more enjoyable and it captures the tiny piece beautifully. It prevents the head from moving, but that is an acceptable trade off in this case.

Just when you think you have every type of LEGO Christmas decoration you could ever want, 40820 Up-Scaled Santa Minifigure comes along and delivers a festive edition of a format that already works really well. If you're a fan of this minifigure, then the upscaled version deserves a place in your collection.

GRAHAM E. HANCOCK

Verdict
79
Another excellent upscaled minifigure doesn't reinvent the concept, but demonstrates how well it works with a dash of holiday joy.

Santa features two printed elements that are unique to the set.

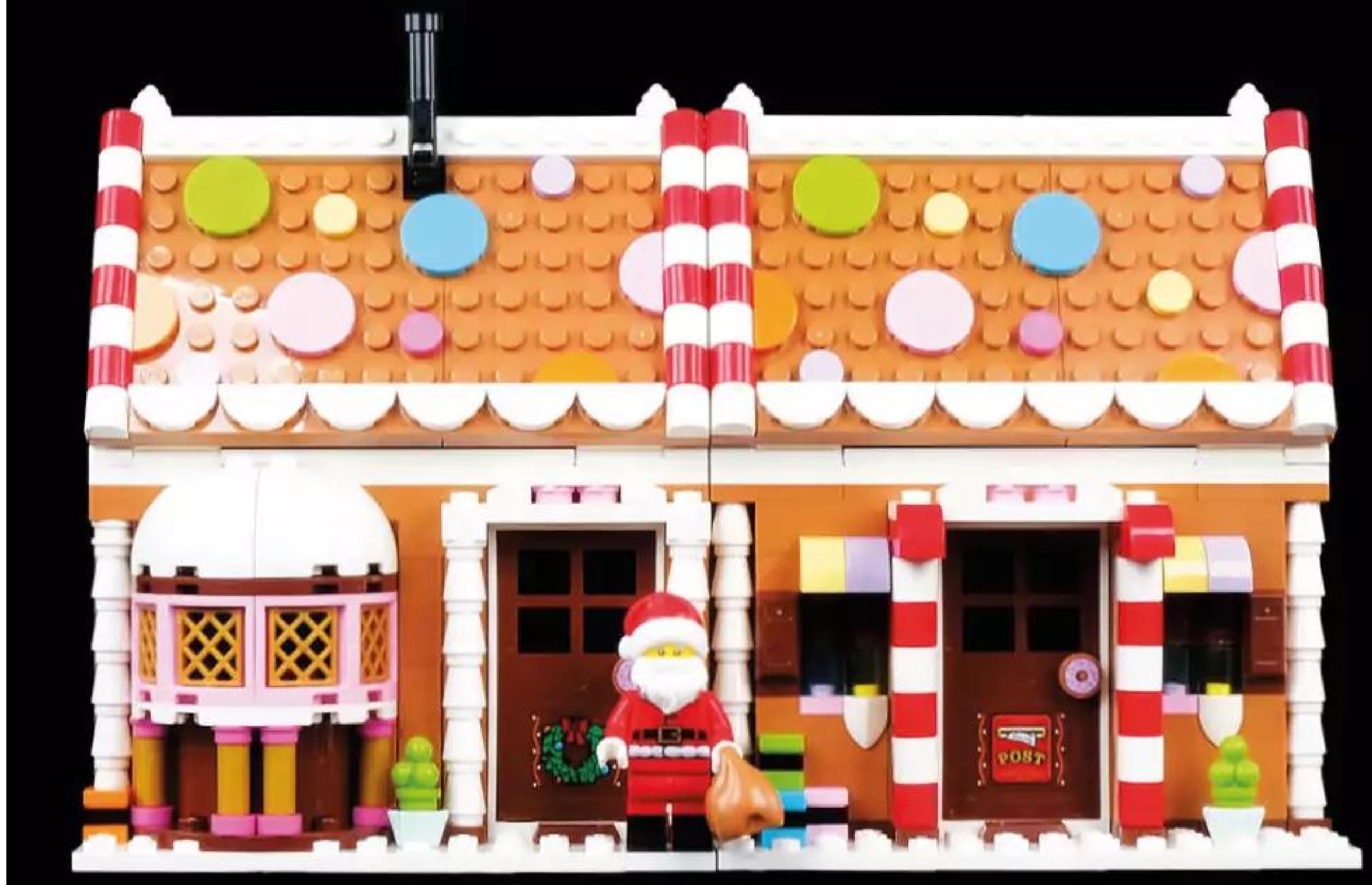
40809

Theme: Seasonal / **Price:** £34.99, $39.99, €39.99 /
Recommended age: 10+ / **Pieces:** 498 / **Minifigures:** 1

Festive Gingerbread House

Some Christmas staples need to be revisited, especially now that the LEGO Group has embraced the brand's association with the holidays in such a whole-hearted way. There aren't just a couple of festive sets each year now, there's a whole batch of them.

If you own the wonderful 10267 Gingerbread House, then you should know that 40809 Festive Gingerbread House is not seeking to compete with the 2019 Winter Village Collection set. This is smaller, simpler and aimed at a younger age bracket.



Different coloured tiles convey candy and icing.

That's entirely welcome though. After all, Christmas decorating would be tedious if every set was a full evening commitment. Sometimes you want to spend an hour building and have a nice little construction at the end of it.

For the most part, 40809 uses basic stacking techniques, but throws in some nice use of candle pieces and bows to provide some interesting architectural flare. Medium nougat is the base hue, with a variety of other colours dotted around the building to suggest the different sweets and icing dollops that decorate this gingerbread structure.

The model is a charming little house that can be displayed closed and cosy or open to imply a fuller street. Nice interior touches provide spaces to place minifigures – such as the included Santa. Collectors may feel that they have enough Father Christmas repeats in their stash, but this set is probably not targeted at long term fans.

A perfectly jolly little set captures a Christmas icon well, even if it doesn't bring anything new to the table.

GRAHAM E. HANCOCK

Verdict
64
This isn't the most wow-inducing Christmas LEGO set ever released, but it looks like a gingerbread house and is packed with festive charm.

40806

Theme: Star Wars / **Price:** £54.99, $59.99, €59.99 /
Recommended age: 10+ / **Pieces:** 697 / **Minifigures:** 1

Gingerbread AT-AT Walker

There have always been fun associations between Star Wars and the holidays, going all the way back to Ralph McQuarrie depicting Yoda as Santa Claus on a Lucasfilm Christmas card. Slightly cruelly, 4002019 Christmas X-wing was offered as an employee gift a few years ago – tantalising fans as to how much fun it can be to mash up a galaxy far, far away with very Earth-bound traditions.

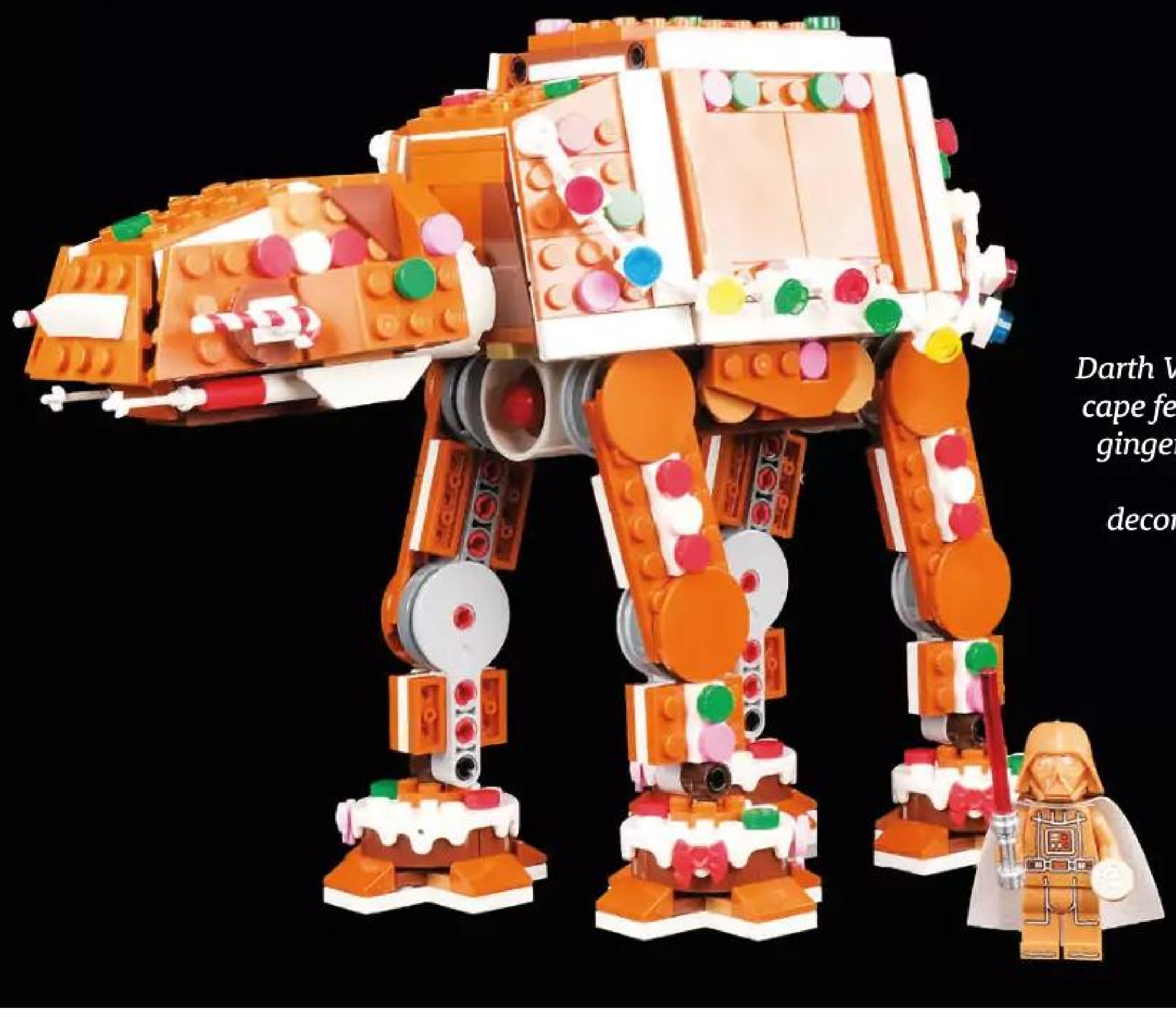
It's nice to see a set in the same style delivered to a broader audience. 40806 Gingerbread AT-AT Walker, as the name suggests, delivers an AT-AT as if it is made from gingerbread. The set's designer clearly had a great time with this, using dark orange elements as the main colour to depict the gingerbread, with white lines to convey the icing and random coloured 1x1 round plates to portray sweeties.

By following the form of the AT-AT precisely – although at a smaller scale than is typical in LEGO Star Wars – there's no doubt as to what vehicle this is. Because the form is so iconic, the set is able to have fun with colour and decoration, so the feet featuring cake tops that serve as splats of icing and candy canes where the screen version has weapons.

The interior is impressive considering the model's small stature, as it provides a spot for Gingerbread Darth Vader. The minifigure is brilliantly decorated, with the various lines slightly wonky as if they have been iced by hand. If you think you've seen everything LEGO Star Wars has to offer, then this set might remind you that the theme is full of surprises.

GRAHAM E. HANCOCK

Verdict
80
This will be a build long remembered. If you love Christmas and love Star Wars, then you need this joyous set in your collection.



Darth Vader's cape features gingerbread icing decoration.

75419

Theme: *Star Wars* / ***Price:*** *£899.99, $999.99, €999.99* / ***Recommended age:*** *18+* / ***Pieces:*** *9,023* / ***Minifigures:*** *40*

GET THIS IF YOU LIKED

75339 Death Star Trash Compactor Diorama

If you like the diorama series – and specifically the minifigure scale sets within it – then 75419 Death Star is essentially a dozen of them combined into a massive circular frame. Seeing the scenes in context and alongside each other only elevates them, so you will probably get a kick out of this ultimate collection of dioramas.

75093 Death Star Final Duel

If play sets are more your speed, especially Death Star themed builds like 75093 Death Star Final Duel, then 75419 Death Star offers the ultimate play set. Because everything is on the same side, it's really easy to move minifigures around the space and pose them in different ways. No-one at Blocks will judge if you make the blaster sounds.

43263 Beauty and the Beast Castle

The large Disney castle sets include playful interiors full of intricate details where you can place minifigures and imagine stories. If you get a kick out of the way those models are packed with multi-level interiors, then you'll enjoy seeing the concept supersized for a galaxy far, far away. There's no exterior on the reverse of 75419, but that would probably have significantly increased the piece count and price.

Death Star

Is this new edition of the ultimate battle station also the ultimate play set? For the first time, LEGO Star Wars breaks the 9,000 piece barrier to recreate the Empire's superweapon

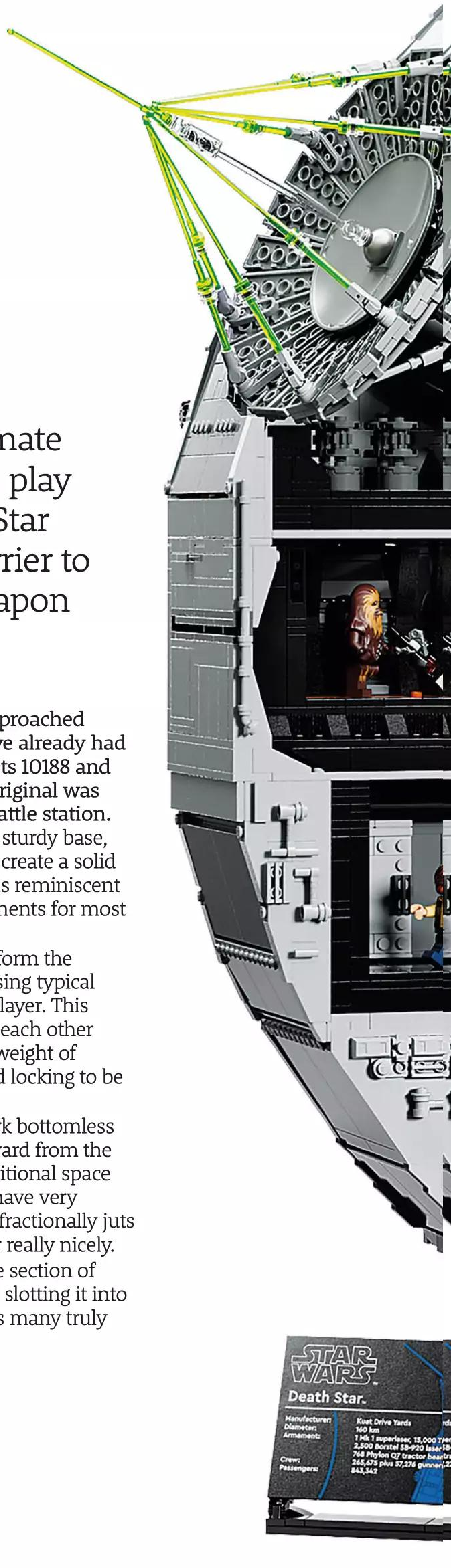
Thank the maker that the LEGO Star Wars team approached 75419 Death Star in a fresh, exciting way. Fans have already had two opportunities for spherical Death Star play sets 10188 and 75159, so it was a real relief when something new and original was unveiled for the latest take on the Emperor's ultimate battle station.

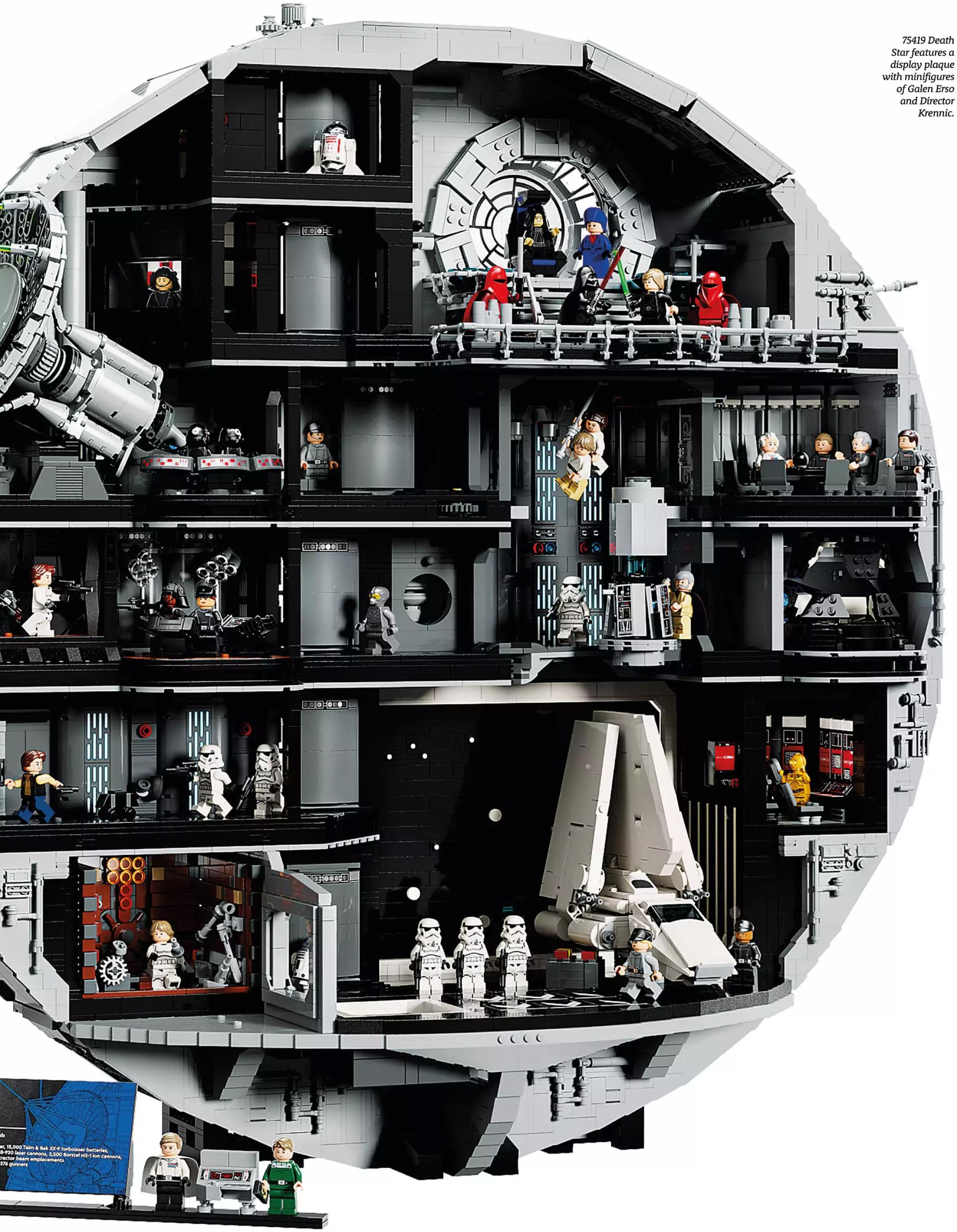
The epic build project begins with the construction of a sturdy base, trellis style. By crisscrossing regular bricks and plates, you create a solid foundation. It's great fun using classic LEGO bricks and it is reminiscent of the previous Death Star play sets, which used such elements for most of their frame.

This quickly progresses into the curved shape that will form the bottom of the space station, which is constructed again using typical bricks, but built sideways and then connected to the base layer. This means that the sections facing in different directions lock each other together, ensuring that this bottom level will support the weight of everything that is to come. There is further reinforcing and locking to be done as you continue.

The first recognisable thing that you build is a trademark bottomless shaft that the Empire so adores. You build a platform forward from the base, which will serve as the hangar area and provide additional space for troops, little vehicles or chaotic battles. The designers have very cleverly built the lowest level so that a grey layer of bricks fractionally juts out beneath a black layer of bricks, which frames the floor really nicely.

A massive 'aha' moment arrives when you build a huge section of floor panelling, which keeps growing and growing, before slotting it into place. It perfectly fits into position and is one of the build's many truly




ds
er, 15,000 Taim & Bak XX-9 turbolaser batteries,
8-920 laser cannons, 2,500 Borstel NS-1 ion cannons,
tractor beam emplacements
276 gunners

75419 Death Star features a display plaque with minifigures of Galen Erso and Director Krennic.

impressive moments. The expanse of black immediately gives a sense of the Death Star hangar from the movies.

You build the trash compactor as its own section and it is like a mini version of 75339 Death Star Trash Compactor Diorama. You build the floor and the walls, incorporating spaces for the minifigures to stand. It's important to pop them in the right places, because a simple mechanism is built in that makes the walls close to recreate the movie moment when the heroes are in danger. In a lovely touch, the dianoga's eye pops up too.

Around this time you also build the base of the elevator shaft, which includes the worm gear piece that is now commonly used for this purpose. It's quite exciting to focus on this as it gives a sense of the scale that the model will end up at, and it isn't long before you build the simple elevator itself, which cleverly features a 'slot' so that minifigures will stay standing within it.

A large grey wall separates the trash compactor area from the hangar and behind it you craft a plain grey section of floor with two exposed studs, where you can place Darth Vader and Obi-Wan for their final confrontation. Adding that section is another great moment that demonstrates how cleverly the model jigsaws together, always followed by bricks that lock things in place. If you plan on building your own large-scale creations and prefer to avoid Technic, it's worth paying close attention.

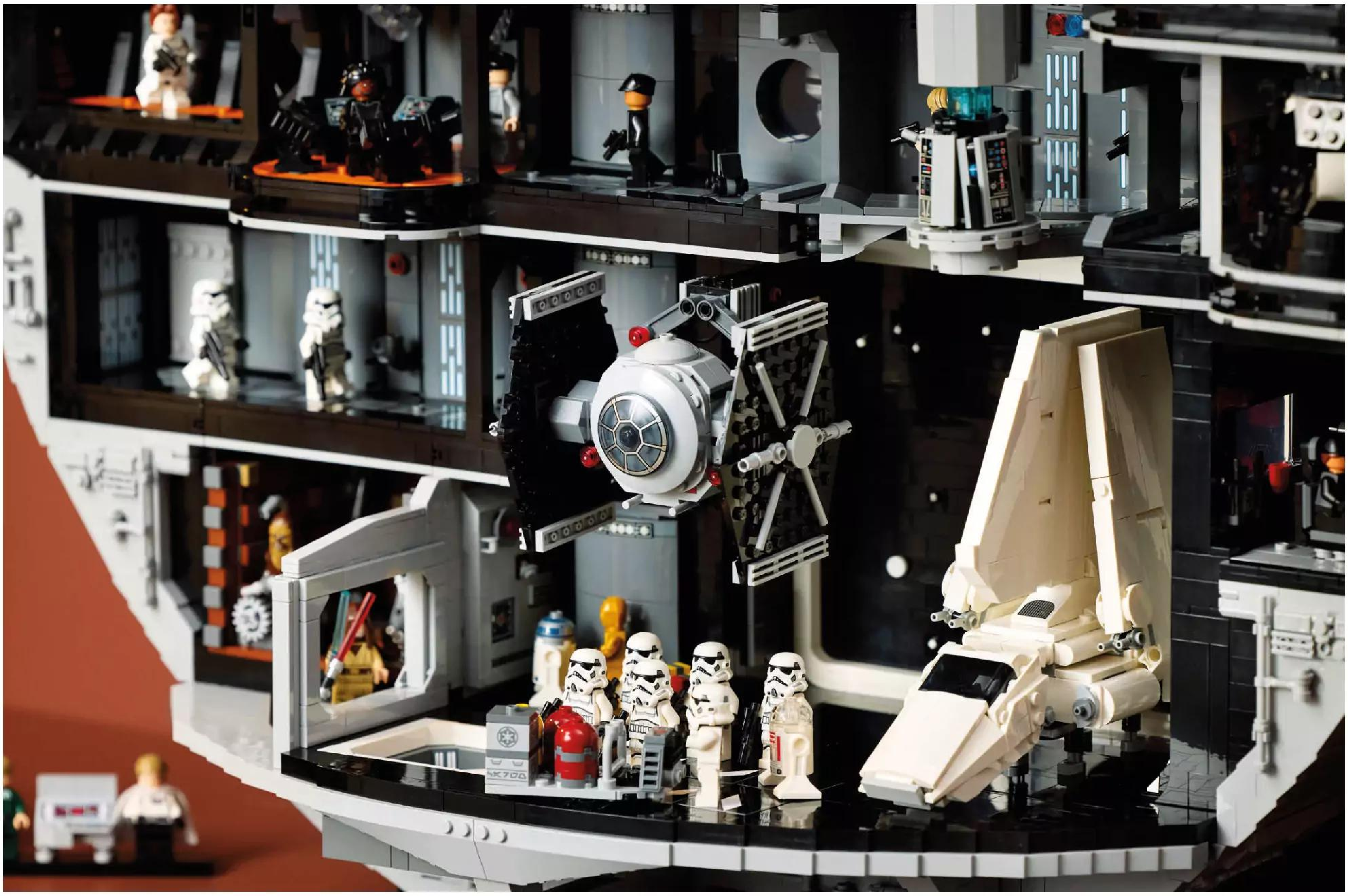
The next floor up, above the trash compactor, is built as a separate area and is rather unassuming, but includes the next part of the lift shaft. There's also a special spot for the torture droid, so it can be tucked away when it isn't busy interrogating political prisoners.

It's surprising when you put together the space backdrop, which sits at the back of hangar, that it turns out to be so very effective. Sometimes brick-built backdrops can look really flat, but it works a treat – in part, because the stars are created by 1x1 round tiles and also by wand elements in white, with the handle poking through. It's not a perfect circle, so gives a truly impressive impression of a star, and the different sizes imply depth.

The next section to build is the hangar control room, which requires some patience as it involves quite a few stickers. They look great, it's just tedious applying them. This room is a good example of how the set benefits from the scale – it's big enough to be recognisable and include some detail, which would be lost were the set much smaller.

Back on the other side of the model, there's a section to build that covers the cell block where Princess Leia is being held. It includes everything you need – the control room where the shootout begins, the corridor they end up pinned in and Leia's cell. You build a hole in the wall that you can drop the minifigures into and they'll find themselves in the trash compactor. Leia's cell is built as a separate module that you can slide in and out through the side of the model, which is handy given that most people building this set will have thick adult fingers.

Darth Vader's meditation chamber is a surprising choice for this set,



Farthest left: *There are some real deep cuts in the set's minifigure collection.*

Far left: *Grand Moff Tarkin can gather his colleagues.*

Left: *There is space for two minifigures side by side in the elevator.*

Bottom left: *40771 TIE Fighter with Imperial Hangar Rack connects to the set.*

Below: *Vader and Luke can duel in the throne room.*

as it doesn't actually appear in the movies on the Death Star, but it's perfectly plausible that it would be here. The entire concept has been ingeniously reduced down to a tiny scale, with some great parts usage present. The sticker references to Anakin Skywalker's life are tremendous fun and lean into the comedic side of LEGO Star Wars.

The attention to detail as you build the tractor beam control panels and chasm above it is fantastic to behold. The suspended platform that Obi-Wan Kenobi finds himself on is constructed so that you can angle it out of the way to make Luke and Leia's swing more dramatic. The choice of a bar rather than string for this was a good one, as minifigures never hang quite right on string.

As you get further up the model, you start to recognise some of its tricks and techniques. They don't become dull and there is still enough variation, but they are not as novel as during the first half of the build. This is by no means like the other mega sized LEGO sets though; at times, it feels like you are slogging through the builds of 10307 Eiffel Tower, 31203 World Map and 10276 Colosseum to get to a worthy display model, whereas with 75419 Death Star, the journey is as enjoyable as the destination.

The conference room and super laser controls are perfectly fine areas to build, but the actual main weapon really mixes things up and brings a different flavour of building altogether. It is very cleverly crafted so that is looks effective on the inside when in position, but more importantly from the outside where it seamlessly fills the slot that you leave for it.

If you have built 75352 Emperor's Throne Room Diorama then you have a little bit of an idea as to how the location will be built in this set, but it broadens out the scene to include some walkway and additional scene setting elements that will encourage you to play out as much of the climactic sequence as you desire. It takes up a good amount of space and somewhat dominates the model, which feels appropriate visually and thematically, as it's where Luke Skywalker saves his father and defeats the Sith.

Some things are worth waiting for – and getting to the hot tub at the end is a fantastic way to conclude the interior of the model. Anyone who has played LEGO Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy or its sequels will remember the Stormtroopers relaxing and unwinding, so it's a real treat to have the gag made physical in this set.

That is far from the only fun reference in the model, which has an Octan canister built into the base, a classic red mug in the trash compactor, a hidden mini kit from the video games, a Stormtrooper height chart to measure Luke against, the EP-N5 fastener that prison labourers are constructing… and many more. There are regular smiles to be had as you build.

Unless you prefer traditional Ultimate Collector Series models that focus on display predominantly, this set will blow you away. Of all of the sets released at this piece count, it has the most engaging build process by far. When complete, it is the Death Star play set you dreamt of as a child – but it's adult sized. It is easy to play with, there's just the odd area where things are a smidge fiddly. The 40 minifigures mean that you always have characters to populate the various rooms, though you might choose to bring in a few extra Stormtroopers.

It has tremendous display presence too, as you can see all of the rooms from one angle. 10188 Death Star had the advantage of being spherical and therefore mimicking the space station's shape, but on display you could never see every side. By opting for a different approach, the designers have created something that allows you to admire everything at once. It is also more polished and refined than the previous set, making certain rooms larger because of the bigger piece count, and just using modern techniques to make other areas really sleek.

If your budget allows this set to join your collection, you are unlikely to be disappointed by it.

GRAHAM E. HANCOCK

Verdict
92

75419 Death Star takes full advantage of its epic piece count to deliver a set that is a joy to build, has a commanding display presence and insists on being played with.

75428

Theme: *Star Wars* / ***Price:*** *£119.99, $139.99, €129.99* /
Recommended age: *12+* / ***Pieces:*** *1,088* / ***Minifigures:*** *1*

Battle Droid with STAP

Memorably flying around the swamps of Naboo, STAP stands for Single Trooper Aerial Platform. As the name suggests, they are single pilot rides for Trade Federation Battle Droids. This set delivers the vehicle and, because it would look weird without it, a Batte Droid.

It's a build of two halves. The STAP itself is great fun to construct and is very accurate to the source material. There is multi directional building to establish the essential shape of the brown vehicle, with Technic used in appropriate places, such as the pedals and engines.

The designers have clearly paid very close attention to the screen proportions, as there are subtle gaps and stud offsets so that key areas, such as the top gun section, are correctly proportioned. What's more, it's very solid and swooshable, which allows this to be more than a display set.

As well as the vehicle itself, you have a black stand to build, so the STAP can look as if it is floating. It's simple, elegant and almost disappears as you look at the model on display. Until the LEGO Group figure out how to defy gravity, it's a fine solution.

The Battle Droid is built independently from the STAP, so it can be displayed as a single figure or on the vehicle. Unfortunately, it is nowhere near as successful as the main event.

Battle Droids have a lithe, spindly look – their tiny limbs distinguish them from other droids. This LEGO version does not capture that, with chunky upper arms, thick legs and a head shape that only vaguely resembles the screen design, as a result of poor part selection. With 75434 K-2SO released at the same time and demonstrating how it can be done, the weaknesses of this set are all the more apparent.

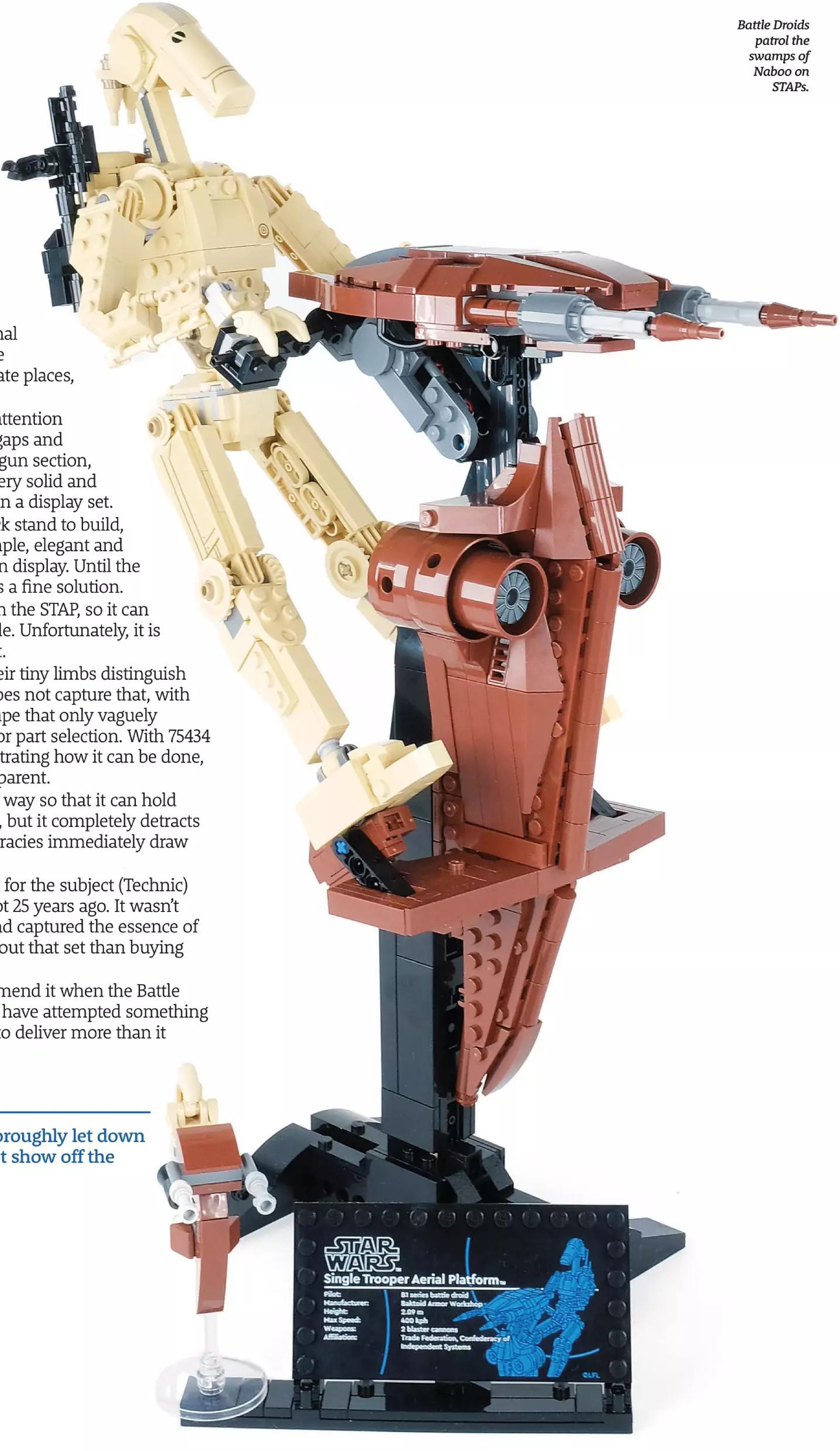
The figure has probably been designed this way so that it can hold up on the back of the STAP and remain stable, but it completely detracts from the look of the model because its inaccuracies immediately draw your eye.

8001 Battle Droid used the correct medium for the subject (Technic) and delivered an excellent version of the robot 25 years ago. It wasn't perfect, but it had impressive functionality and captured the essence of the screen trooper. You are better off seeking out that set than buying this modern version.

Excellent as the STAP is, it is hard to recommend it when the Battle Droid is so weak. The LEGO design team may have attempted something too ambitious here and expected the System to deliver more than it actually can.

GRAHAM E. HANCOCK

Verdict **50** **It's a shame that the STAP is so thoroughly let down by the Battle Droid, which does not show off the System at its best.**


STAR WARS
Single Trooper Aerial Platform
Pilot: B1 series battle droid
Manufacturer: Baktoid Armor Workshop
Height: 2.09 m
Max Speed: 400 kph
Weapons: 2 blaster cannons
Affiliation: Trade Federation, Confederacy of Independent Systems
©LFL

Battle Droids patrol the swamps of Naboo on STAPs.

75434

Theme: *Star Wars* / ***Price:*** *£79.99, $89.99, €89.99* /
Recommended age: *10+* / ***Pieces:*** *845* / ***Minifigures:*** *1*

K-2SO

Throughout the Star Wars saga, fans have enjoyed comedic droids like C-3PO, R2-D2 and Chopper. K-2SO arrived on screen in Rogue One: A Star Wars Story with a slightly different sense of humour, which remained consistent during his screen time in Star Wars: Andor. The character is a repurposed Imperial security droid and confidant of Cassian Andor.

Like many Star Wars designs, K-2SO seems to defy gravity. On screen, he has long, spindly limbs and the challenge in any LEGO set was clearly going to be how to make them thin enough to support the model's weight and also look the part (just like 75428 Battle Droid with STAP).

In this case though, the designers found a compromise so that K's proportions are not sacrificed. By building his feet into the display base, the droid remains rigid and stable, although it of course means that he is a statue rather than a figure.

The accurate proportions continue up the model, demonstrating what careful attention the design team paid to the screen design when crafting this set. The shape of the droid is really accurate, with just a little smoothness sacrificed on the upper torso. Through a real variety of element selections, the Imperial mechanics are accurately translated into bricks.

When it comes to the head, things are really impressive. You place a circular element on the torso and then clip the head into place, with keeps the ring steady. It's an unorthodox technique that works well. Even better though are the eyes, depicted by Technic pins, and the mouth, depicted by the end of an upside down 1x2 grille element.

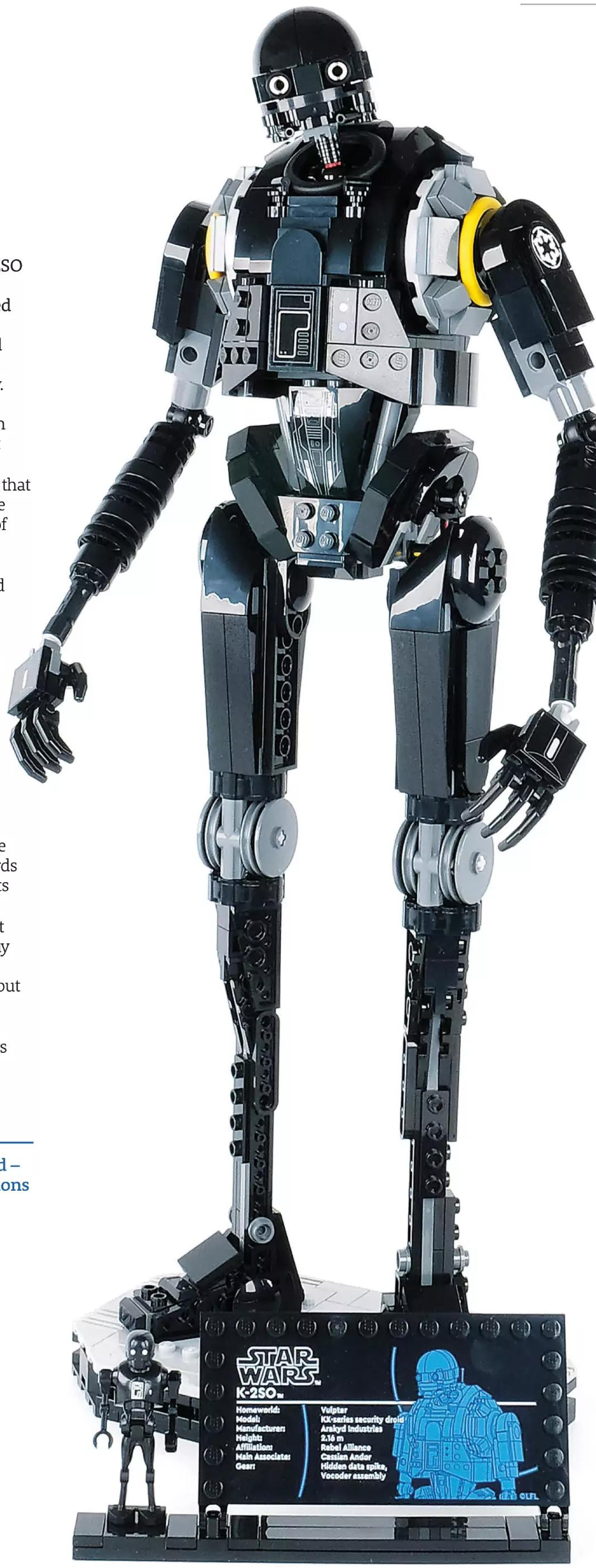
It is hard to niggle at a set that is as movie accurate as it seems reasonable to expect from the System. There are more stickers than is ideal and the chest perhaps protrudes forwards by one too many plates, but these really are small complaints given the context.

What makes 75434 K-2SO so excellent – and makes the set live up to some of the best LEGO character builds – is the way that the designer has incorporated his very specific stance, slightly stooped over, which could easily have been missed but is an essential part of the droid's vibe.

Andor may be a show that has been poorly served by LEGO sets, but the handful released have been excellent. This set is exactly as you want it to be when factory fresh – no reprogramming required.

GRAHAM E. HANCOCK

Verdict **84** **The best humanoid droid LEGO set ever released – this set beautifully captures the unique proportions and characterful pose of Andor's sidekick.**


STAR WARS
K-2SO
Homeworld: Vulpter
Model: KX-series security droid
Manufacturer: Arakyd Industries
Height: 2.16 m
Affiliation: Rebel Alliance
Main Associate: Cassian Andor
Gear: Hidden data spike, Vocoder assembly
©LFL

K-2SO is a repurposed Imperial droid.

43264

Theme: Disney / **Price:** £34.99, $39.99, €39.99 /
Recommended age: 4+ / **Pieces:** 206 / **Minifigures:** 4

Toy Story Celebration Train & RC Car

In a similar vein to 43212 Disney Celebration Train, which released as part of the Disney 100 commemorations, 43264 marks 30 years since Toy Story first hit the big screen in 1995.

The build is expectedly simple for a 4+ set, with three of the four small builds using the same chassis piece. However as with 43212, each section has a distinct visual identity and the variety is enough to keep you engaged.

The set starts with Jessie and the engine, which uses a playful group of primary colours but is otherwise uninspired. Jessie hasn't been included in a LEGO set since 2019 and is largely unchanged from her superb previous minifigure, so it's great to have her available again.

This Toy Story inspired Buzz has not been available since 2019 either and the minifigure is still fabulous. Unfortunately, the clear helmet is missing, but otherwise the printing on the figure's face, torso and armour is all brilliant. His associated build is his spaceship box, which is decorated with a printed Star Command tile.

Bo Peep is the model's highlight, using the wide body skirt piece to perfectly capture the character's pink hoop skirt. Her build is a homage to her bedside lamp and includes her sheep, although the head printing on the round dome element is a bit small.

Finally, Woody is largely the same as he was in the previous celebration train, although now lacking the dual-printed legs. Obviously his accompanying build is different, which swaps the Sherrif backdrop for RC, the remote-controlled car.

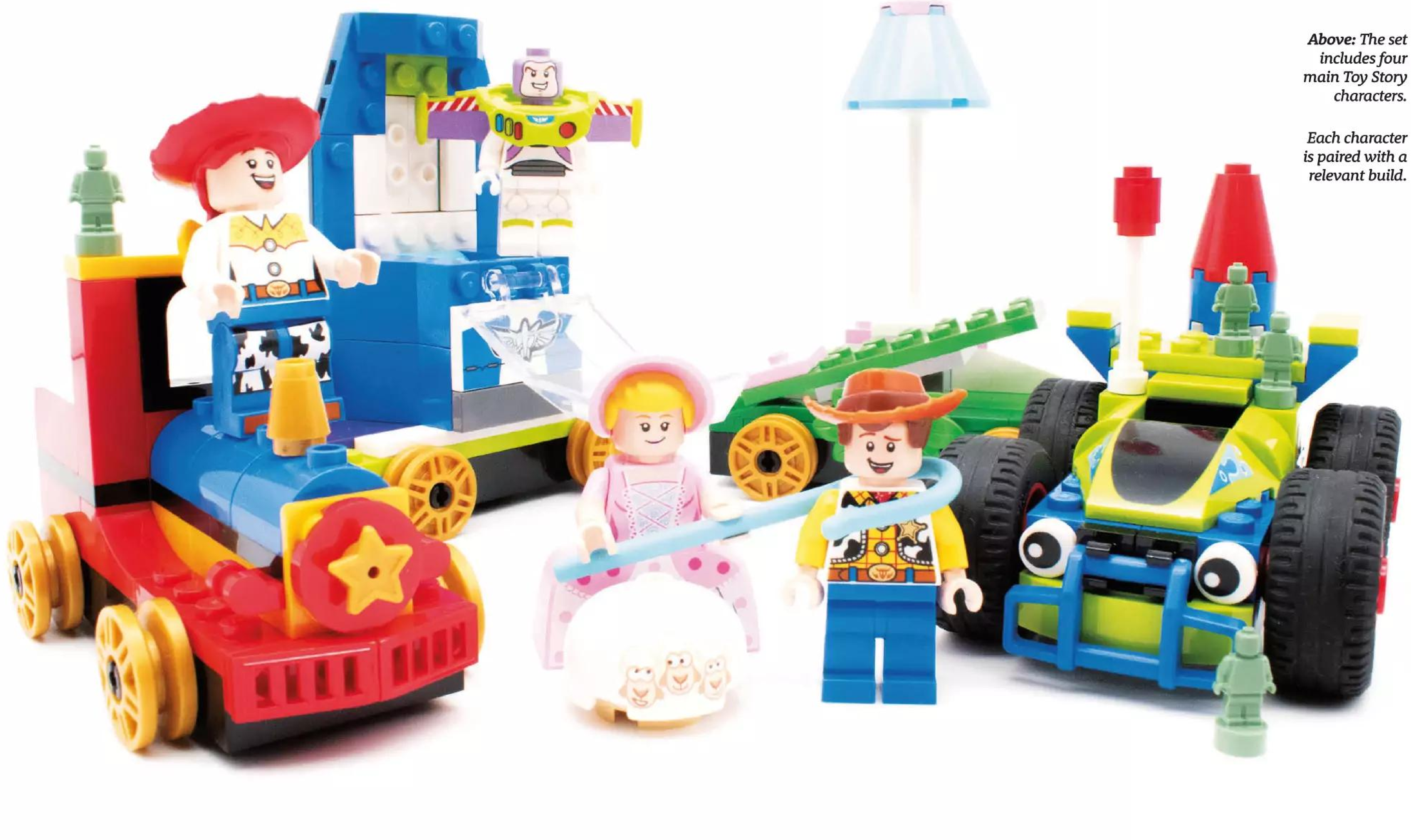
Broadly, RC's proportions look off compared to the source material – the brick-built nature of the model makes the car stockier than his depiction in the film, in which he is wide and thin. However, the front of the car benefits from the use of the grill piece and smaller eyes compared to its predecessor (10766 Woody & RC), which looked too childish.

As in 10766, statue elements represent the Army Men, although the recolouring from green to sand green is a step backwards in terms of accuracy.

With an RRP of £34.99, the celebration train concept is a decent way to pay homage to Toy Story, even if the price feels inflated. It's not quite the same as getting a substantial, full-scale model though. Hopefully there will be more in the toy box to celebrate the first Pixar film's anniversary soon.

ANTHONY WALKER-COOK

Verdict 57 **The highlight of the model for children, AFOLs and Disney adults is the minifigure lineup, but there's some fun in the actual build too.**



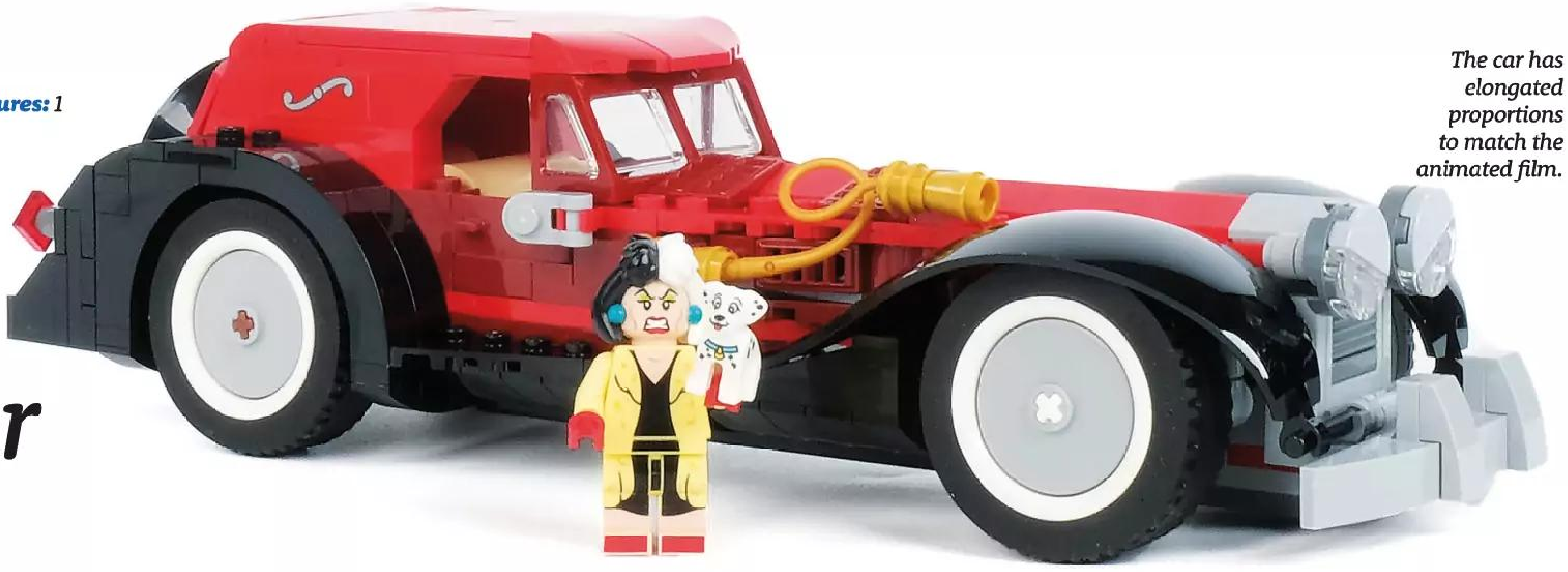
Above: The set includes four main Toy Story characters.

Each character is paired with a relevant build.

43277

Theme: *Disney* / ***Price:*** *£44.99, $49.99, €49.99* /
Recommended age: *9+* / ***Pieces:*** *378* / ***Minifigures:*** *1*

Cruella De Vil's Car



The car has elongated proportions to match the animated film.

LEGO Disney continues the 2025 focus on 101 Dalmations with 43277 Cruella De Vil's Car. Some of the most memorable scenes the villain has in the classic flick are when she is manically driving her car around the British countryside in search of her stolen pooches.

It's rare that this style of car is delivered as a LEGO set and it looks absolutely fantastic. The portions are somewhat exaggerated, which is appropriate as it is based on animated source material, but it could also serve in a real-world layout as a vintage motor. The black and red colour scheme is incredibly striking and it's a great match for the screen vehicle.

Where it excels the most is in capturing the 'face' of the car, which has headlights implying evil eyes and a bumper that implies a toothy mouth. The designers have really delivered this accurately and deserve a lot of credit for getting the details right. There's a great part usage at the front, where hot air balloon sections capture the swooping lines of the vehicle.

The minifigure is neat if you don't have the character, but isn't as good as the edition that was released in Collectible Minifigures 71038 Disney 100, which had an additional fur coat accessory. This version does have a new angry face that is perfect for when she is in the driver's seat though. The dalmatian is changed too, with a blue collar this time.

Who would have thought a film from 1961 would be getting top tier LEGO sets in 2025? This is another one worth adding to the collection.

GRAHAM E. HANCOCK

Verdict 72 **A classic film gets an elegant, well-crafted LEGO set more than 60 years after its release. If this doesn't impress you, no LEGO thing will.**

75636

Theme: *ONE PIECE* / ***Price:*** *£24.99, $29.99, €29.99* /
Recommended age: *8+* / ***Pieces:*** *299* / ***Minifigures:*** *3*

Windmill Village Hut

If any set was going to include Shanks, it's very appropriate that it's a bar. Monkey D. Luffy's mentor is always partying and enjoying the good life, so it's nice to see that reflected in the smallest ONE PIECE model.

The simple build comes together nicely, conveying a nice shack that can easily be adapted to other themes and settings. The bar makes efficient use of space, finding room for glasses and bottles in a tight area.

There's also a jetty, so that you can recreate the moving moment when Shanks departs and makes his promise to Luffy. In a really nice touch, the design team has sculpted a different version of the straw hat with a bar connector – so you can have the minifigures hold it.

Shanks is a simple but effective minifigure, with his wig cast in the perfect shade of red. Another version of the straw hat is included that features his hair underneath, which shows how well the designers understand the importance of the accessory.

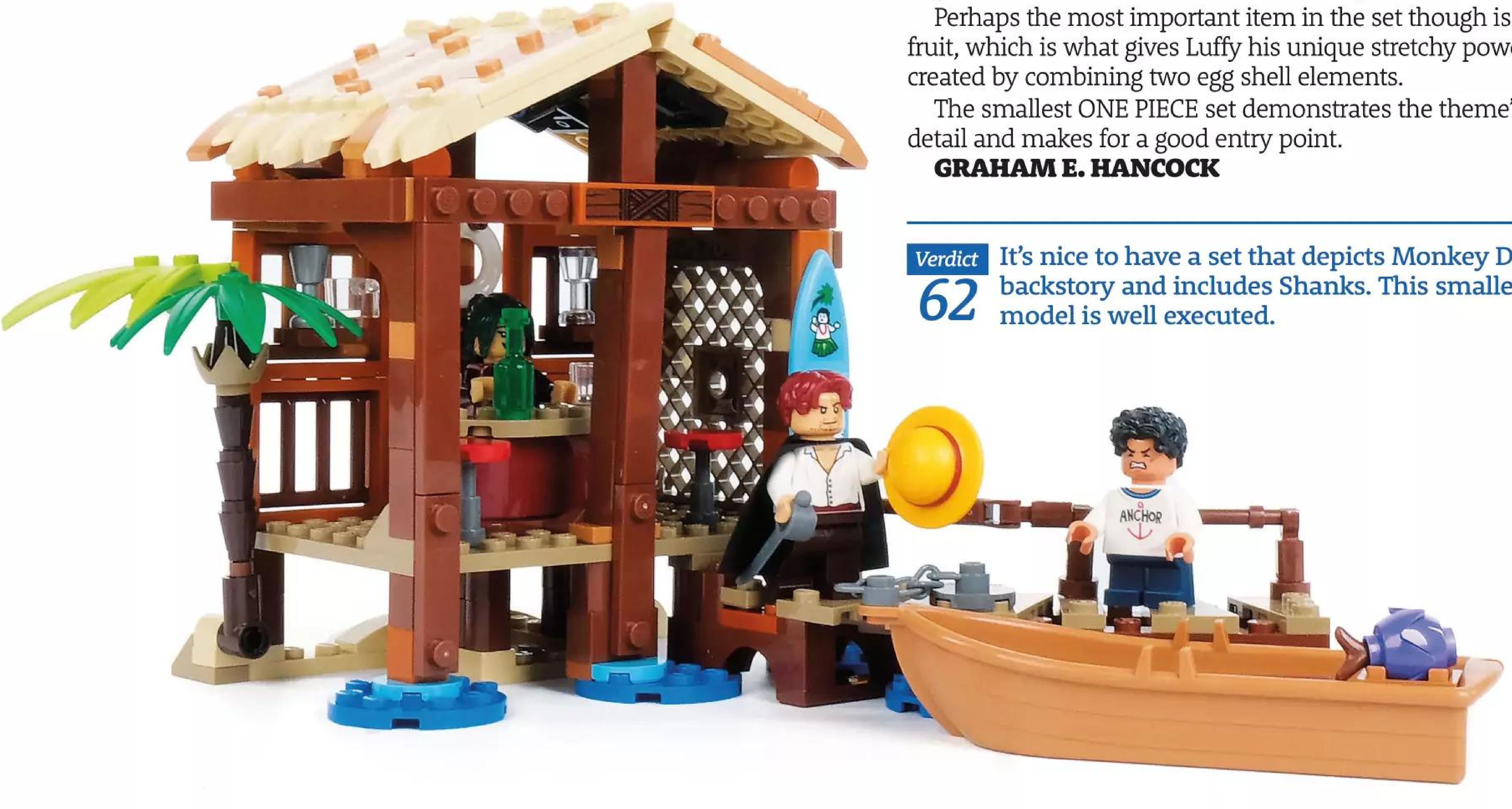
It's always nice to see a rowboat in a LEGO set as the piece is still very close to the original that was introduced some 45 years ago. Here though it is also relevant to what it allows the set to play out, as it can be used to depict the scene where Shanks saves Luffy from the sea monster.

Perhaps the most important item in the set though is the Gum-Gum fruit, which is what gives Luffy his unique stretchy powers. It's cleverly created by combining two egg shell elements.

The smallest ONE PIECE set demonstrates the theme's attention to detail and makes for a good entry point.

GRAHAM E. HANCOCK

Verdict 62 **It's nice to have a set that depicts Monkey D. Luffy's backstory and includes Shanks. This smaller sized model is well executed.**



The set includes two different versions of Shanks' hat.

75639

Theme: *ONE PIECE /* ***Price:*** *£119.99, $139.99, €129.99 /*
Recommended age: *10+ /* ***Pieces:*** *1,376 /* ***Minifigures:*** *5*

The Going Merry Pirate Ship

If you plan to discover the One Piece and become Pirate King, you need a ship to sail

75640 The Baratie Floating Restaurant might be the largest set in LEGO ONE PIECE, the new theme inspired by the Netflix live action adaptation of Eiichiro Oda's epic manga series, but 75639 The Going Merry Pirate Ship is undoubtedly the centrepiece of the collection.

Monkey D. Luffy's dream is to become King of the Pirates and his raison d'être is to sail free as a pirate. That makes the Going Merry a symbol of his core drive, as it's the first ship that the Straw Hat Pirates sail on.

It continues a long tradition of LEGO pirate ships, which goes back to 1989 when the classic theme launched. Today's brick vessels rarely use the massive, moulded hull elements that were introduced back then though and instead the entire ship is built from individual pieces.

As a result, it's an intricate, interesting and involved set to build. Sideways building really allows the hull to take shape in a convincing way that works well at this scale. The design team has made the outer walls as thin as possible so that there is room for some lower deck space.

Constructing the details of that interior as the ship takes shape is fun, whether it's the fairly simple cabin or the more interesting kitchen. While more interior rooms are always welcome, it's probably as much as can be squeezed into a set of this size.

A function is built into the front of the set, where a stud shooter element is used as the cannon, with a trigger subtly built into the deck. While it would have been fun to see the classic cannon element here, it would have been out of scale and there are a couple of other nods to classic Pirates – including the treasure chest that has barely evolved since the 46-year-old original.

One of the most enjoyable sections to build is the ram's head that sits at the front of the boat, as clever part usage forms the shape beautifully. It's interesting in that it doesn't opt for any SNOT, which of course would often be utilised for something so specific, and instead uses appropriately shaped elements judiciously. There are two open studs on top so that Luffy has a place to sit.

At the back of the ship, the way that the deck angles up is really clever, as everything lines up elegantly and then there is an additional section that slots in and out, where you store some of the set's many accessories.

Like all blocky pirate ships, the size increases quickly towards the end. After you have built the bulk of it, you quickly construct the masts using predominantly Technic bricks, then add the rigging and sails. These really give the entire model a sense of scale and scope, ensuring that it truly commands attention when on display.

The sails are made of flexible plastic and it works well. They capture the manga origins of the story, as they give the ship a cartoony feel (that its subdued colour scheme doesn't otherwise provide), with brilliant, vibrant printing that conveys the Straw Hat Pirates logo that Luffy's crew unveils in the finale.

That's not the only special touch that nods to the Season 1 closer – at the end of the build, you put together two tangerine trees, a reference to the crew's kind gesture to Nami.

All five crew members are included. This theme's minifigure game is strong – the designers are clearly having fun with the vibrant anime vibes. Nami's blue and orange outfit looks fantastic and her hairpiece is a fabulous addition to the collection of minifigure wigs. Zoro has a ridiculously good accessory – a sword that matches the classic ninja sword, but with a connector that goes around the minifigure's neck, giving the impression that he is holding it in his mouth.

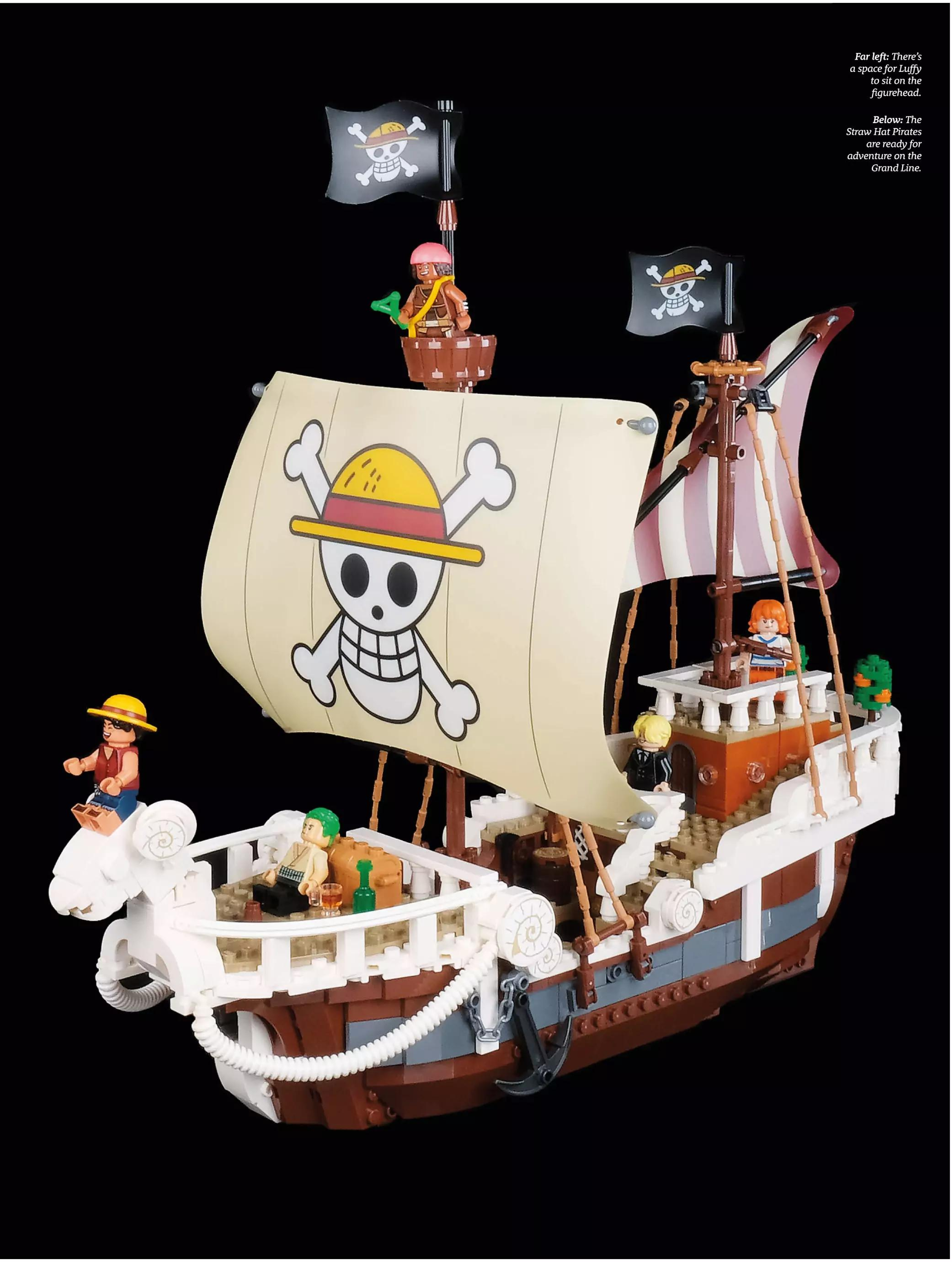
One niggle about this set – and the theme in general – is that the random collectible 'wanted' posters are a bit too random. There are eight to collect and this set comes with four – in the review copy, there were duplicates of two designs. It would be nice if there was a way that the LEGO Group could avoid duplicates in a single box.

LEGO fans often desire bigger sets – and that's usually true of pirate ships. The bigger the vessel, the more that you can pack into it. In the case of 75639 The Going Merry Pirate Ship though, the scale is perfect – the design in the series is quite simple, it isn't overly designed or fussy, so there's little that would be gained from a larger piece count. This set doesn't need to be the size of 10365 Captain Jack Sparrow's Pirate Ship to be successful.

If you only get a single set from ONE PIECE, make it 75639 The Going Merry Pirate Ship. It's fun to build, looks striking on display and represents the screen vessel well.

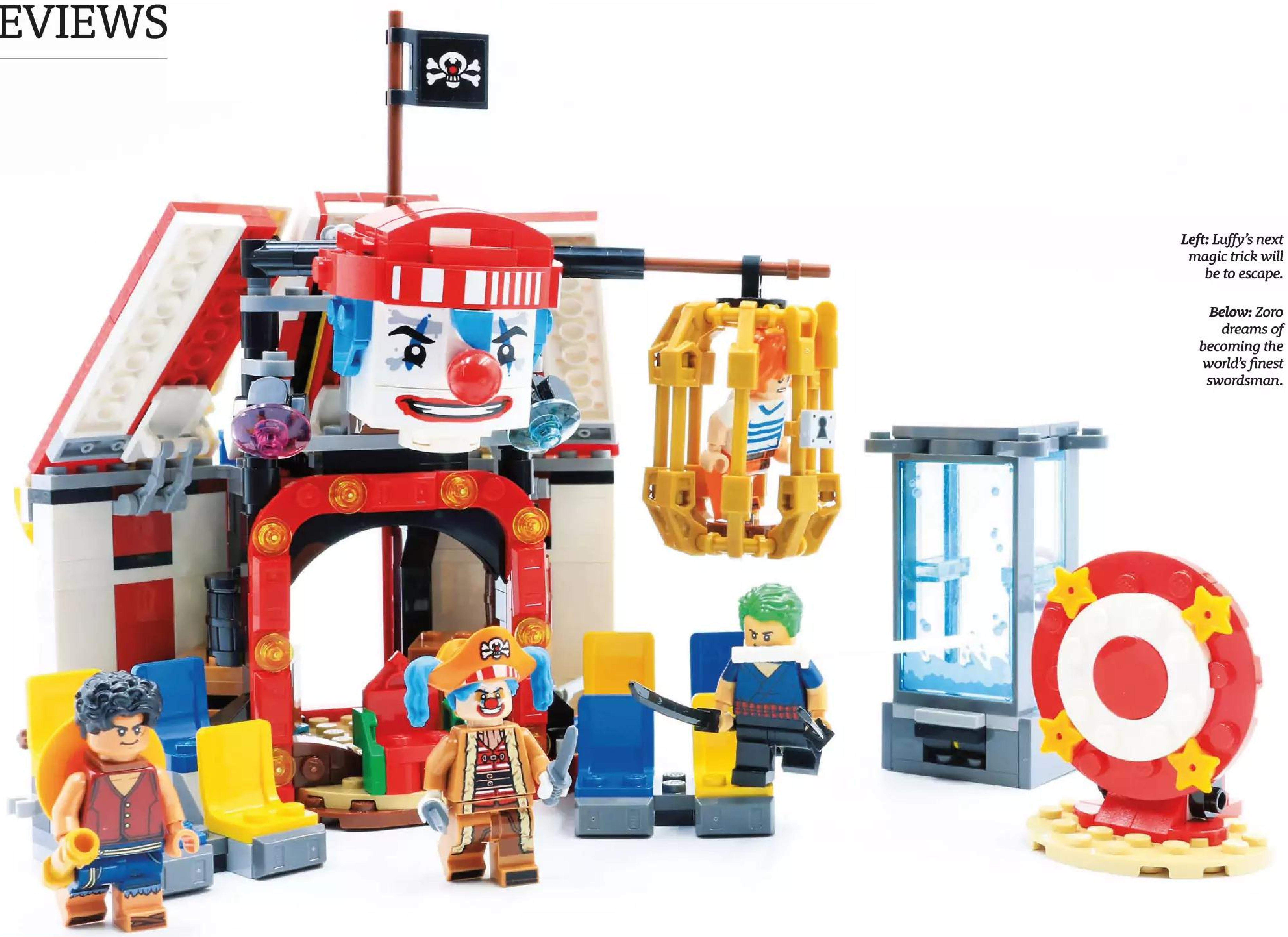
GRAHAM E. HANCOCK

Verdict
83
A beautifully scaled model delivers everything to an exceptionally high standard. It's fascinating to build, accurate to the material and packed with play potential.



Far left: *There's a space for Luffy to sit on the figurehead.*

Below: *The Straw Hat Pirates are ready for adventure on the Grand Line.*



Left: *Luffy's next magic trick will be to escape.*

Below: *Zoro dreams of becoming the world's finest swordsman.*

75637

Theme: *ONE PIECE* / ***Price:*** *£44.99, $54.99, €49.99* /
Recommended age: *8+* / ***Pieces:*** *573* / ***Minifigures:*** *4*

Buggy the Clown's Circus Tent

One of the four Emperors of the New World and captain of a clownish pirate crew, Buggy the Star Clown has a ruthless reputation. When Luffy and Zoro find themselves in Orange Town to recruit Nami, she tries to frame them in order to steal Buggy's treasure and things don't go well. They form an alliance and manage to escape the pirates by using their enemies' cannon against them. It's an explosive introduction for Nami's character that demonstrates her sense of conscience, which will be relevant in her later adventures with the Straw Hat crew.

It all happens within the colourful confines of Buggy's circus. 75637 Buggy the Clown's Circus Tent is surprisingly detailed considering it is a relatively small model. Hinge pieces capture the essence of the rounded shape of the tent. Practical crates of gear are stored at the back, with Buggy's throne positioned to watch over everything.

The set, like the live action set, features all of the elements you associate with the circus, such as colourful seating for spectators and transparent yellow studs for bright lights. There are spotlights that use minifigure pose elements to angle downwards. It's a great model and that's before considering the play features.

To capture the action that occurs in the battle scenes, you build the water tank where Luffy is briefly imprisoned and the cage where Nami is imprisoned.

The minifigures add to the storytelling and look great. Buggy's overcoat is printed with its ostentatious fur trim and the new hair mould for his blue pigtails looks perfect. Luffy and Nami are on the simpler side, accurately reflecting their costumes in the show.

The real standout is Zoro, as he comes with his three swords. One of the swords uses a new attachment to make it appear as if he is grasping the blade between his teeth. It's a small yet extremely effective detail that really captures Zoro's fighting prowess.

Although 75637 Buggy the Clown's Circus Tent is one of the smaller sets within the ONE PIECE collection, it offers plenty of playability by really distilling this key episode into a truly fun model. With its excellent minifigures, especially Zoro and Buggy, this is a set that will appeal to fans of the series.

KAT REES-JAUKE

Verdict 65 **A great introduction to the Straw Hat crew in a fun set that balances an enjoyable build, fun play opportunities and authentic details.**

75638

Theme: *ONE PIECE* / ***Price:*** *£74.99, $79.99, €79.99* /
Recommended age: *9+* / ***Pieces:*** *926* / ***Minifigures:*** *5*

Battle at Arlong Park

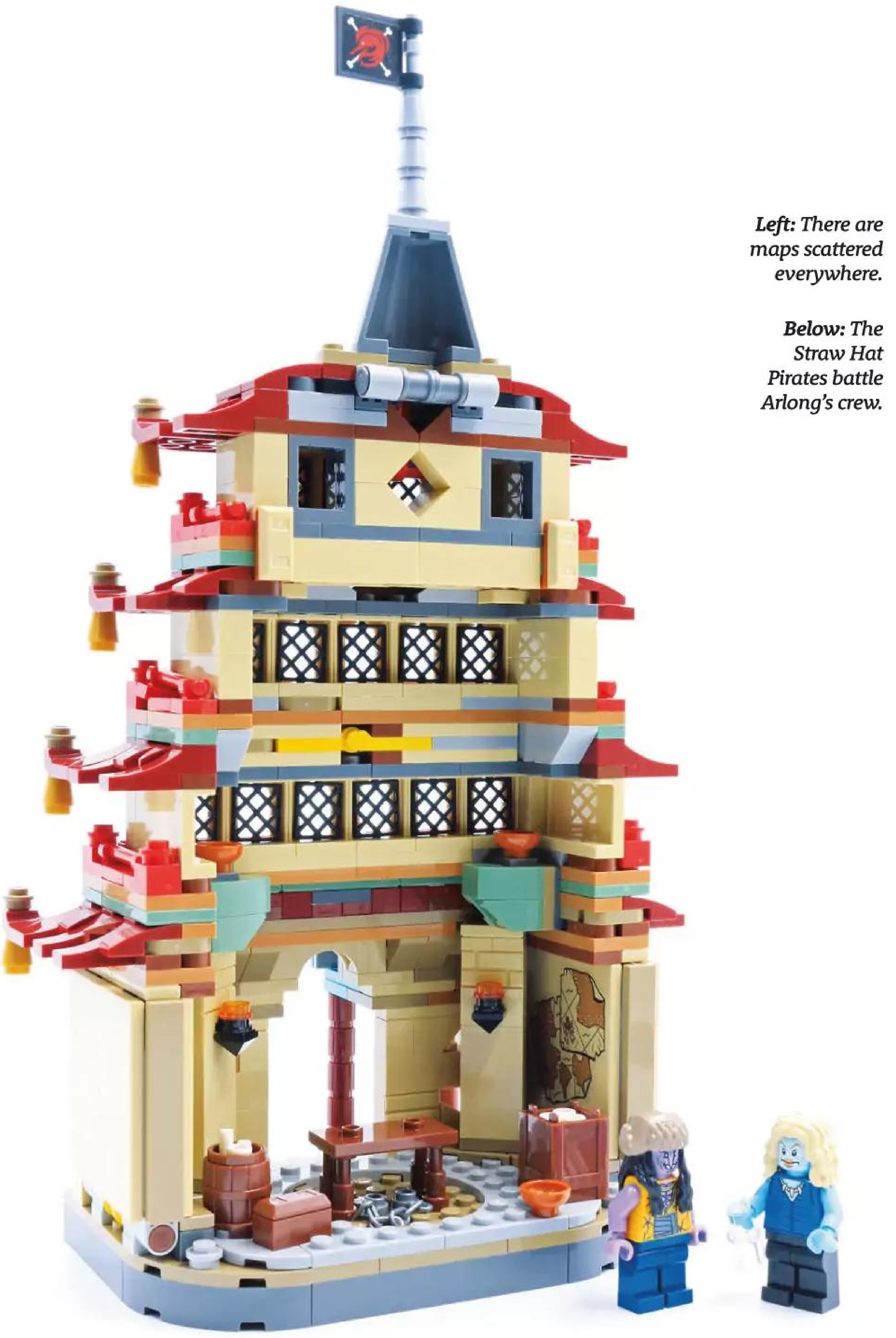
When Luffy learns that the tyrannical Arlong forced a young Nami to endlessly create maps for him, Luffy destroys his tower in a fit of rage. Obliterating an entire pagoda provides incredible visuals for both the original ONE PIECE anime series and its live action adaption. Frustratingly, sometimes what appears on screen doesn't necessarily work as a LEGO set.

This model is very ambitious and incorporates a mechanism throughout the tower that allows it to be destroyed. On the lowest level, the walls are hinged via Technic pins to explode outwards. Then each of the subsequent floors either uses a modular connection or a clip to hold it in place loosely enough for the play feature to work. It sounds impressive and it does recreate the show's dramatic finale. However, putting it together is repetitive and dull, making the thought of putting it back together an unpleasant one.

Every side is the same and every floor is pretty much identical. Because the tower is rigged for destruction, there are almost no interior details. The ground floor includes some references to Nami's imprisonment as a map maker, with boxes of LEGO candle elements that brilliantly suggest rolled up parchment. Aside from this point of interest, the set is a fiddly, repetitive build that is extremely delicate.

Moving the model around is almost impossible as there are so few clips holding it together. While this may not be an issue in a set intended for older LEGO fans, the box states that this model is aimed at children. A child will willingly knock a normal tower over – there really is no need for such a delicate, tedious play feature.

Considering the repetition, it would have made sense to break up the process by alternating the build between constructing the pagoda and the mini builds. They stalls are cute and fun, inspired by the broader fairground. There's a great flick mechanism on the shooting gallery that allow you to knock the targets over with a stud.



Left: *There are maps scattered everywhere.*

Below: *The Straw Hat Pirates battle Arlong's crew.*

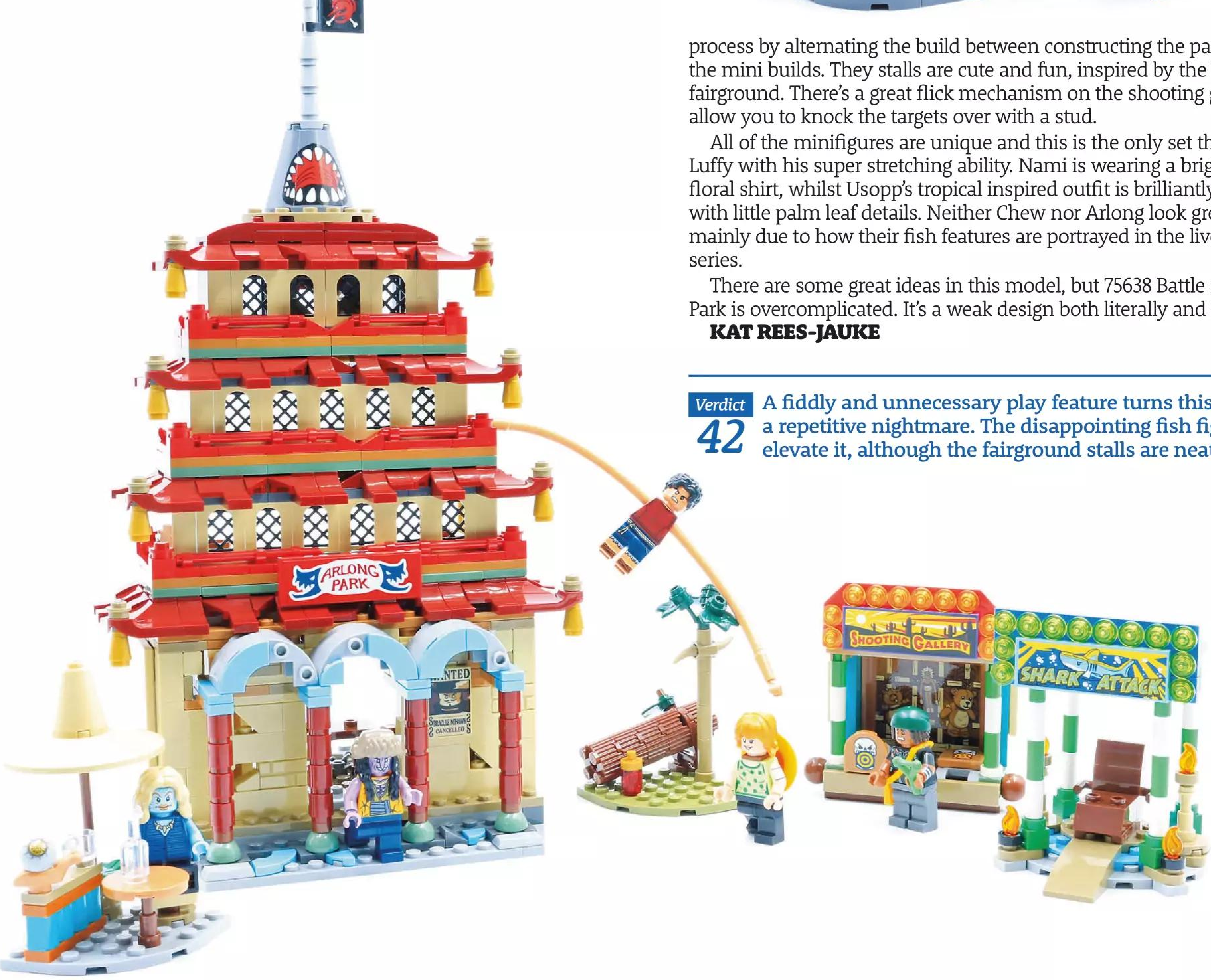
All of the minifigures are unique and this is the only set that includes Luffy with his super stretching ability. Nami is wearing a bright green floral shirt, whilst Usopp's tropical inspired outfit is brilliantly printed with little palm leaf details. Neither Chew nor Arlong look great, but that's mainly due to how their fish features are portrayed in the live action series.

There are some great ideas in this model, but 75638 Battle at Arlong Park is overcomplicated. It's a weak design both literally and figuratively.

KAT REES-JAUKE

Verdict
42

A fiddly and unnecessary play feature turns this model into a repetitive nightmare. The disappointing fish figures don't elevate it, although the fairground stalls are neat.



75640

Theme: *ONE PIECE* / ***Price:*** *£269.99, $329.99, €299.99* /
Recommended age: *10+* / ***Pieces:*** *3,402* / ***Minifigures:*** *12*

The Baratie Floating Restaurant

You can be reassured that there won't be any fighting while dining at the Baratie, an establishment where the customer is always valued

Although ONE PIECE is targeted at teenage boys, the manga, anime and live action version (on which the LEGO sets are based) also have a following of adult fans. It's therefore appropriate that 75640 The Baratie Floating Restaurant is offered as an 18+ model, with the piece count and attention to detail you expect from such a label.

The Baratie is undoubtedly one of the most impressive pieces of set design in the Netflix series. On screen it is bonkers, over the top and in keeping with the way that the show takes the wild, surreal manga concepts and presents them similarly exaggerated in live action.

It's also a location that is explored a bit in the show – things happen around the exterior, action occurs in several interior spaces, so it's worth exploring in a way that you only can with 3,402 pieces. It's more 75419 Death Star than 75355 X-wing Starfighter, in the sense that it is a large play scale model designed for minifigures rather than a model that sits apart from the rest of the theme.

That said, the scale is significantly fudged in the set. In the show, there is an entrance door in the fish head and one in the centre of the vessel. In the set, the central one is regular minifigure size, but the other one is smaller and purely decorative. A more successful aspect is the effort at forced perspective, which has the higher levels of the ship much smaller than the lower levels, which sort of works and sort of doesn't. The concept is solid, it is just perhaps a bit too extreme and another 500 elements might have benefited the set here.

Getting to the point that you can judge the sizing of the set is a joy. The fish head comes first and it's a great start to the model, immediately demonstrating some fabulous build methods. The lips, constructed with 2x2 round elements, line up perfectly with the top of the head, so that there are almost no gaps showing. It's really impressive and satisfying.

There's a great deal of sideways building across the exterior that gives the set a decent texture, with other highlights being the angling of the statues either side of the main entrance and the angel statue at the very top of the vessel.

Like many massive minifigure sets, the exterior is only part of the story though and throughout the build you fill the interior with detail. The set includes the kitchen, the main dining room, the bar (in the fish head), the treasure room and the office.

The finest interior building moment is when crafting the curving staircases, which are cleverly constructed and look really elegant when complete. The kitchen is also a space that the designers have depicted effectively, with a very clever solution for storing the tiny kitchen utensils.

Space has been used well throughout – there are plenty of furnishings and details to make this feel authentic to the show, while leaving enough space to place and position minifigures. This is especially true at the spacious booths, which have room for multiple minifigures so that you can recreate what happens in key scenes.

Five 'wanted' poster tiles are included in the set and they are packed at random, with eight to collect in total (they also come in the other ONE PIECE boxes). There's also a classic printed 2x2 treasure map from Pirates, offering a nod to the LEGO Group's classic in-house theme.

There's no risk of lacking minifigures to populate the model, as the set includes an impressive cast of 10. Luffy, Zoro, Nami, Usopp, Sanji, Zeff, Garp, Helmeppo, Koby and Mihawk are all present, so it's a box to get if you want all of the core Season 1 heroes.

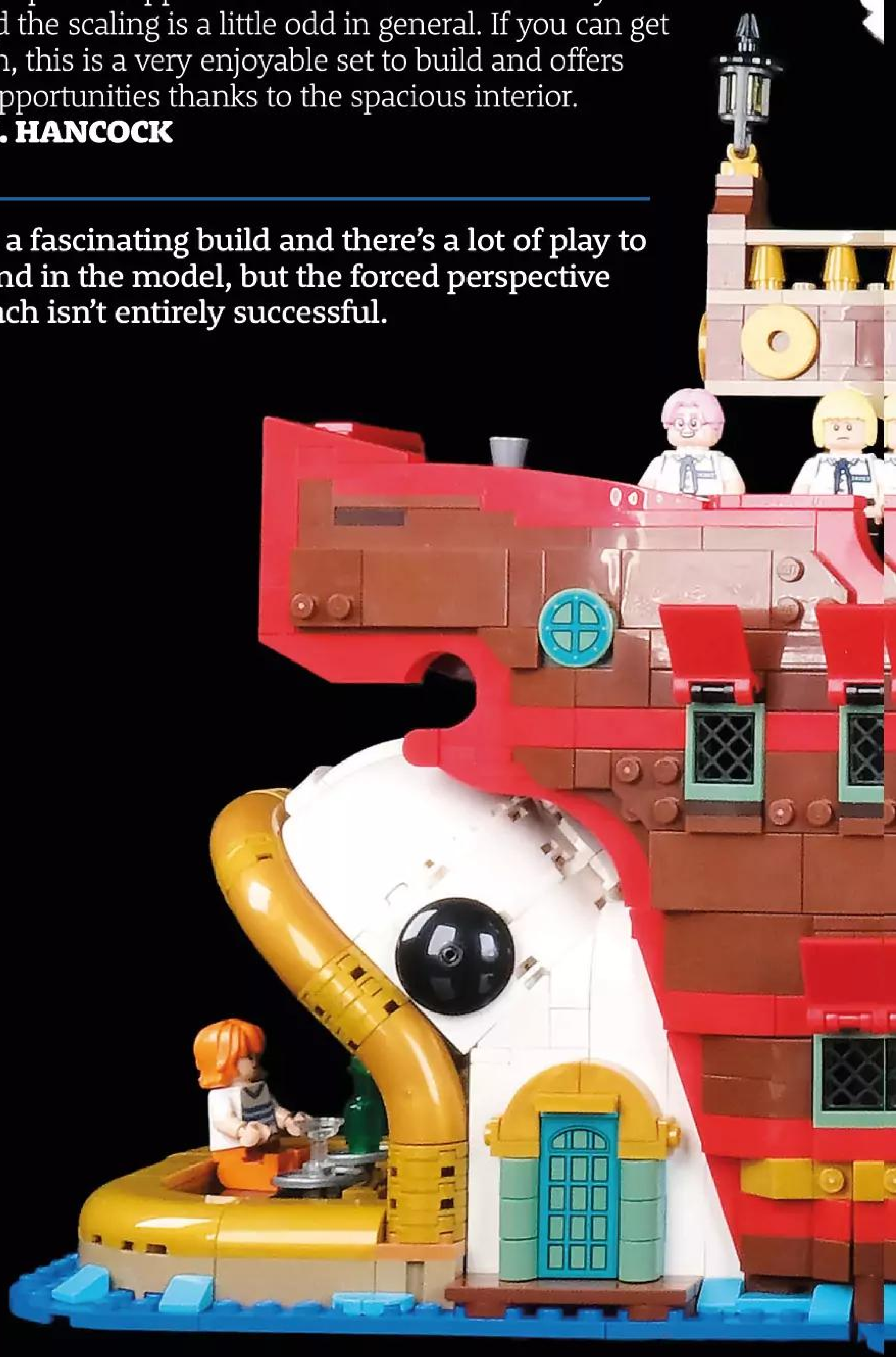
Zeff is a standout thanks to the fabulous moustache element that depicts his unique braided styling, with Gary also very appealing thanks to some intricate torso printing. All of the characters are great – the LEGO design team has done a good job of capturing them in the stylised format and in some ways that look slightly more authentic in minifigure form than they do in live action.

One of the key action moments happens outside the Baratie, when Zoro challenges Dracule Mihawk to a duel. Splat gears under the jetty allow the two minifigures to reenact the sword fight that sees Zoro cut down and in need of healing. There's also a simple boat to dock alongside the Baratie.

The forced perspective approach does not work as well as you would hope and the scaling is a little odd in general. If you can get past that though, this is a very enjoyable set to build and offers plenty of play opportunities thanks to the spacious interior.

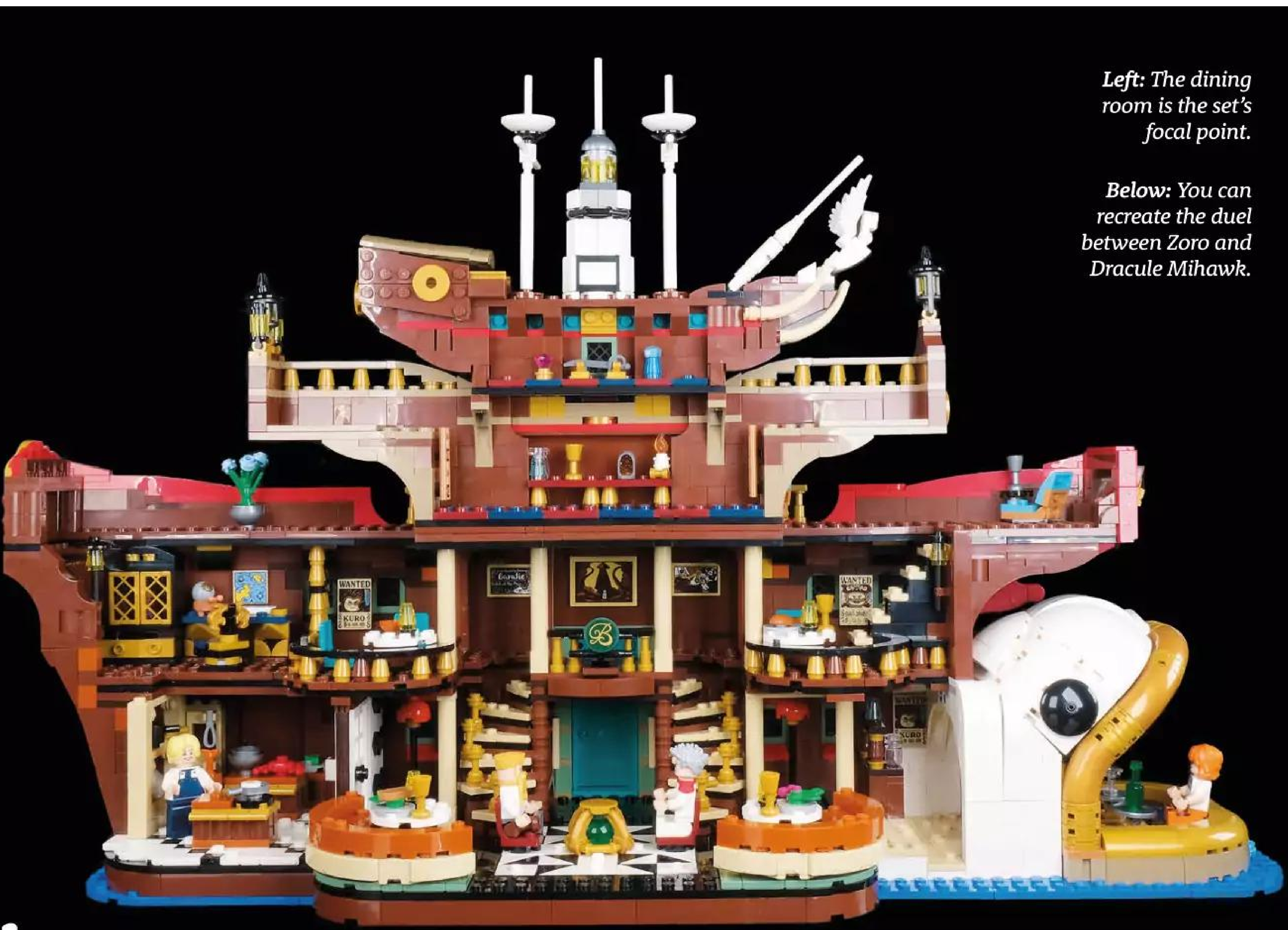
GRAHAM E. HANCOCK

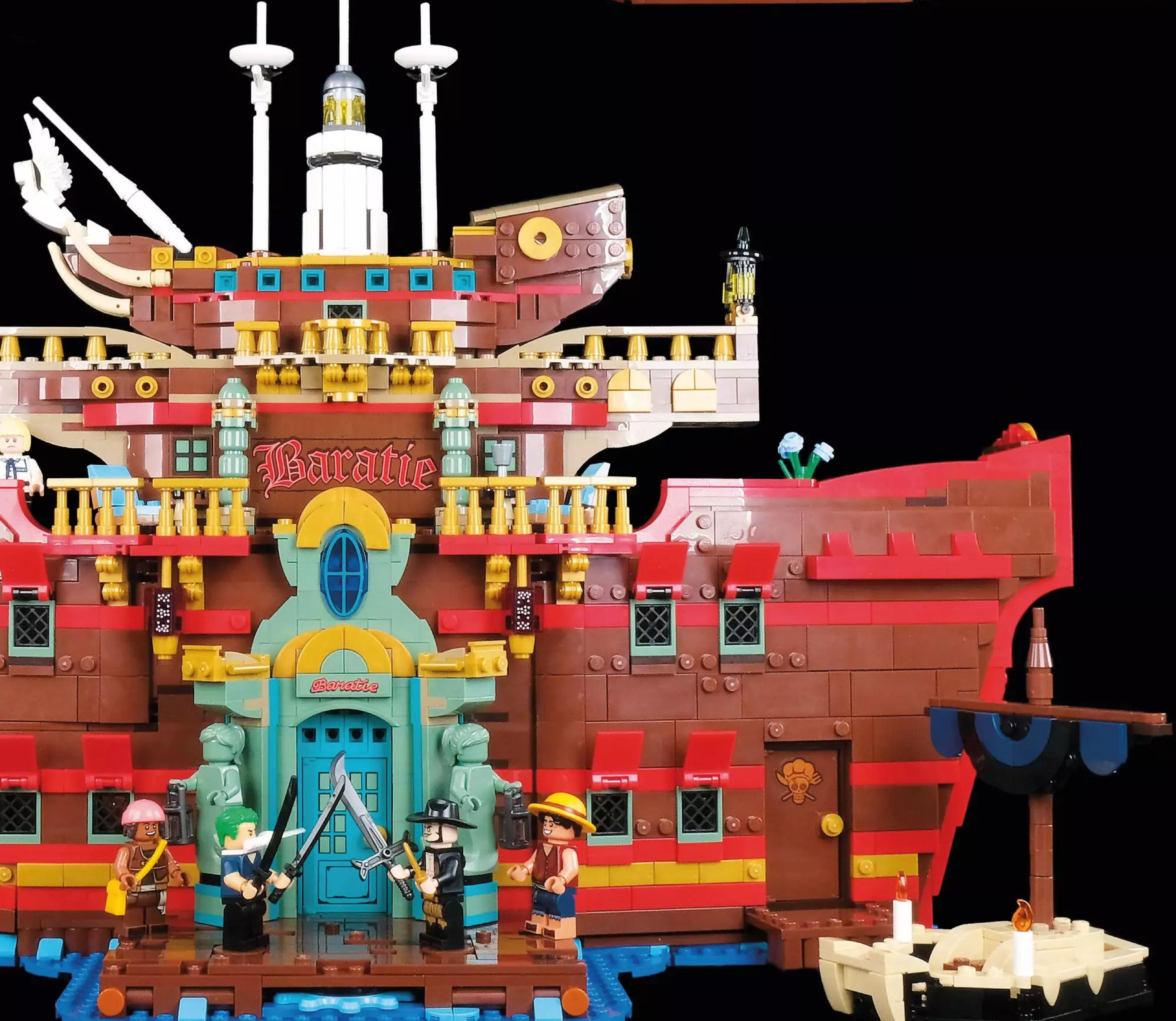
Verdict
76
This is a fascinating build and there's a lot of play to be found in the model, but the forced perspective approach isn't entirely successful.



Left: The dining room is the set's focal point.

Below: You can recreate the duel between Zoro and Dracule Mihawk.



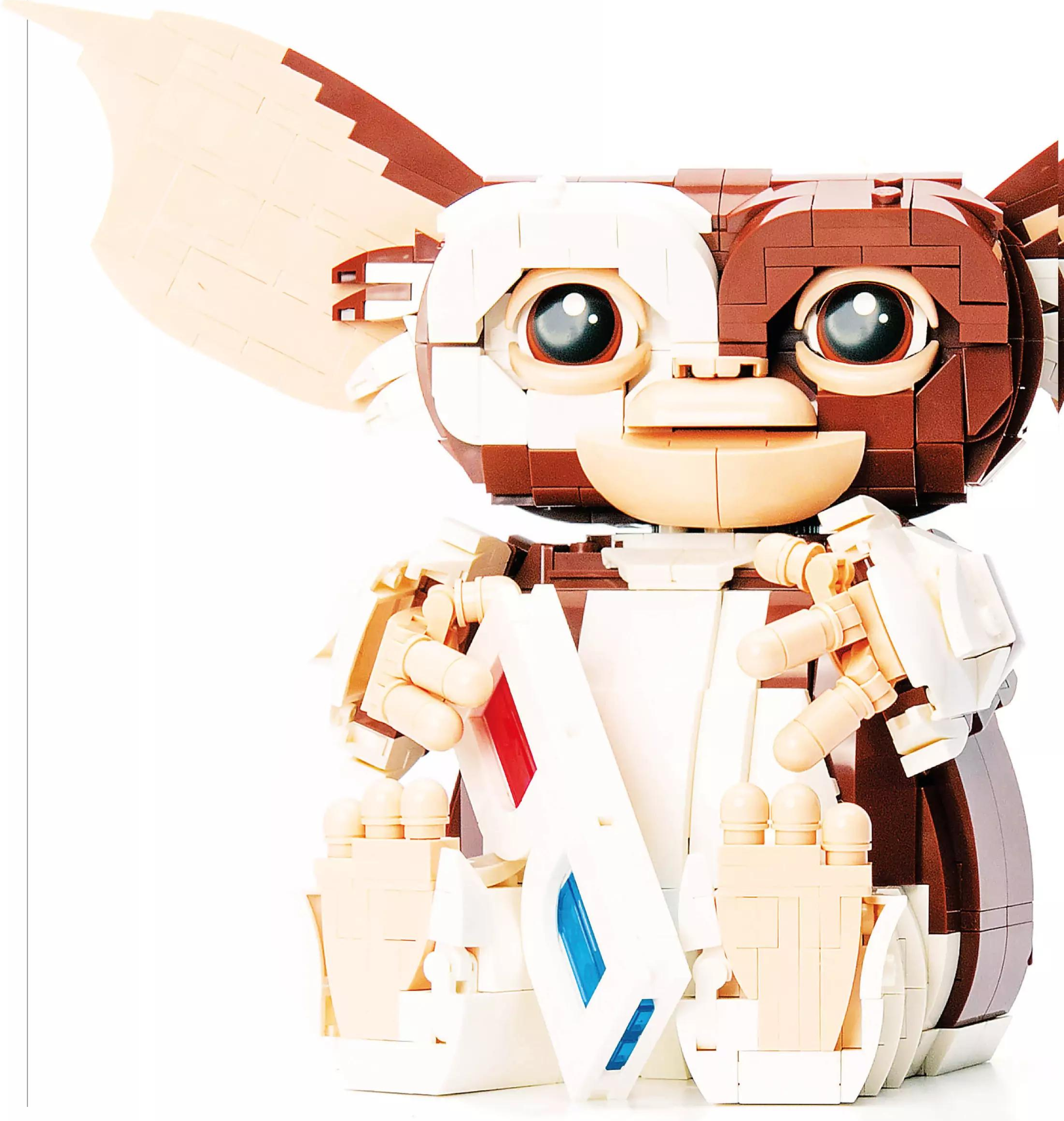

Baratie
Baratie

21361

Theme: *Ideas* / ***Price:*** *£89.99, $109.99, €99.99* /
Recommended age: *18+* / ***Pieces:*** *1,125* / ***Minifigures:*** *0*

Gremlins: Gizmo

Don't forget the rules! Does the new 1980s inspired Ideas set achieve magical Mogwai mastery?



***Left:** How can a cute little guy like this turn into a thousand ugly monsters?*

***Below:** The 3D glasses are a 1980s classic.*

Gremlins taught an entire generation three simple rules – keep them away from bright lights, don't get them wet and never feed them after midnight. Now, for the first time, the LEGO Group is giving builders the chance to create their own cuddly Mogwai in brick form and follow those guidelines.

Gizmo is the star of the show, a character as adorable as he is a harbinger of chaos. Capturing that soft, fuzzy and emotive look using hard, angular plastic is the set's primary challenge – it tackles it with a truly inventive build and a lot of clever techniques.

Joe Dante's wild 1984 film sees the cute and friendly Gizmo win over the audience, only for it to transpire that when more of kind spawn, they are altogether more troublesome. It's a fantastic example of the genre mashups that were common in the 1980s, where different film premises were given comedic twists.

Given its huge theatrical success, it's no surprise that it still has a legion of fans who enjoy popping it on for a different type of Christmas movie. Fuma Terai was inspired by the film when he came up with the build for a LEGO Ideas 1980s pop culture challenge. His build was then selected by the LEGO Group as a winner and turned into 21361 by the designers in Billund.

The build process focuses on a central Technic frame to provide stability, around which you layer plates and sloped elements to achieve that surprisingly organic, rounded shape. It's a familiar enough design pattern and any builder who has tackled one of the larger mechs or scaled-up minifigures will spot some familiar methods when it comes to Gizmo.

However, that is where the similarity ends, as the finished article and box art almost don't do the set justice. When it's complete, you could be forgiven for not immediately recognising this as a LEGO set, such is the level of sophistication in the overall shaping and detailing of this unforgettable character.

The texture of his fur is convincing, despite being smooth, simulated through clever parts usage, employing SNOT techniques to offset tiles or slopes and by incorporating a few less common elements in tan and white. Clearly, the designers have paid special attention to the head and eyes.

On screen, Gizmo has a very emotive face, with those large eyes and wide mouth and the LEGO version is an incredible replica. The eyes, using a printed round shield element, perfectly capture an appropriately soulful look and the curved wheel arch elements that form the eyelids create an incredibly convincing and cute face. The mouth and ears are also impeccably formed, with the ears being slightly articulated, providing more opportunities to adjust Gizmo's expression.

Gizmo's limbs are, by contrast, less posable but just as impressive. Although ball and socket jointed arms might have provided more articulation, the option to have a simple rotating shoulder allows for a much more authentic looking Mogwai while retaining a good degree of movement. This simpler design also cleverly avoids the gappy, unnatural look that full ball joints might create on such a compact, organic model.

The hands are impressively constructed, too, capable of holding the brick-built 3D glasses accessory, or simply waving. This part of the design differs from the original Ideas submission and is all the better for it. While some fans argue that the original build submissions are often more impressive than the professionally designed final set, this is one example that definitely improves almost every area.

While Gizmo's new builders (or should that be owners?) will be pleased to see their new pet come to life in brick form, there's also a display decision to be made – should he be sitting or standing? Instructions and parts are provided for both modes, but shifting between the two requires an unfortunate amount of dismantling and isn't as straightforward as the packaging and photos might suggest.

Fans will likely already have a favoured option in mind, and although the standing option is a little more display-friendly, the seated pose is equally impressive and perhaps a little more movie-accurate. Be prepared for a significant rebuild if you decide to change your mind after the initial completion.

This set is clearly aimed at AFOLs who hold a deep affection for the source material and they will not be disappointed. It's a rewarding and intricate build that translates the little fellow's difficult-to-capture features into brick form with an exceptional degree of success. The clever use of parts and the final scale of the model justify the price, even if you may have to rebuild a large portion of his body just to make him stand up. It's a faithful, charming and highly recommended tribute to one of cinema's most beloved and rule-breaking monsters..

DAVE CARTLIDGE

Verdict
88

A delightfully clever and challenging build that successfully captures the charm of one of cinema's most beloved creatures. He doesn't even spawn nightmare monsters.

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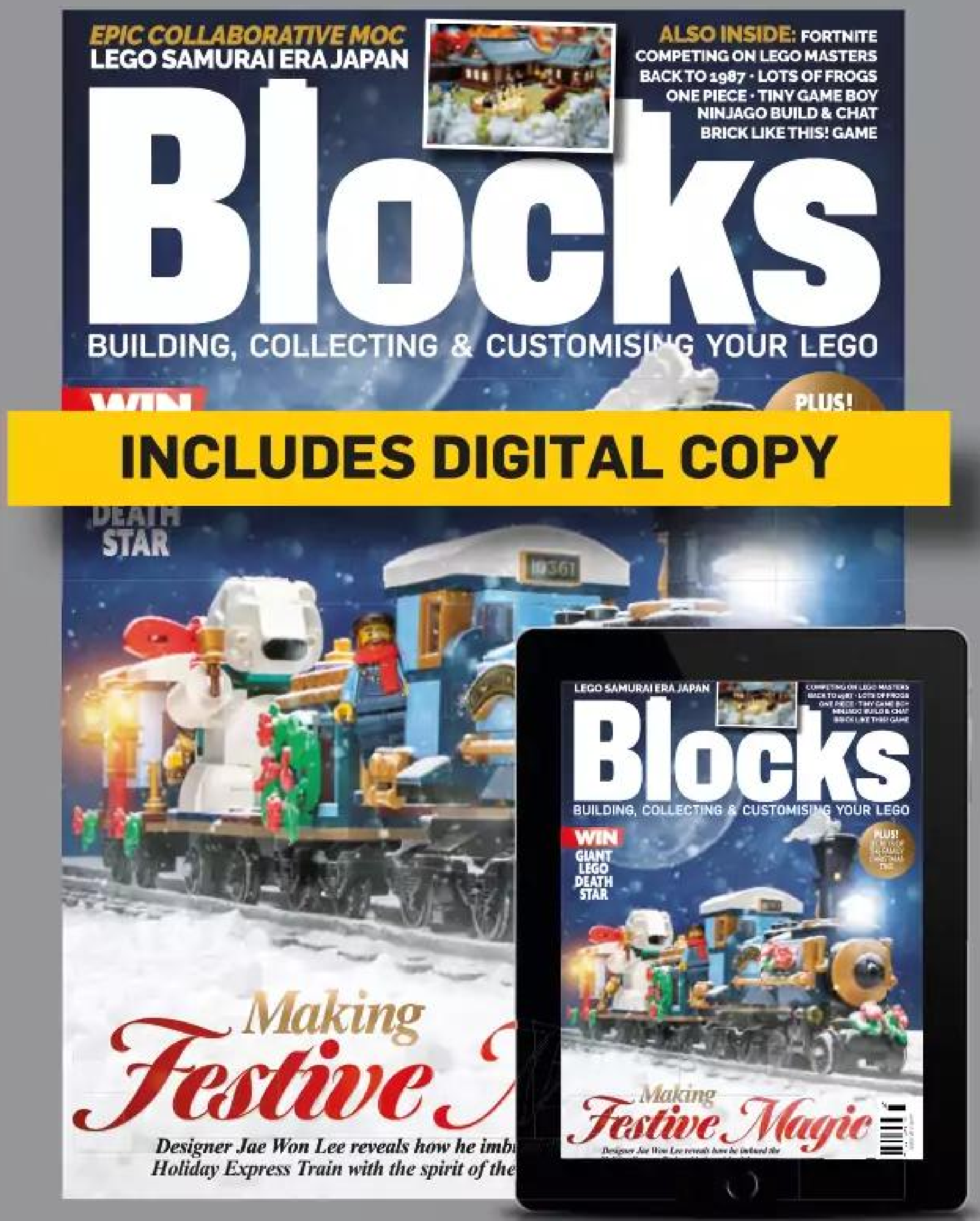
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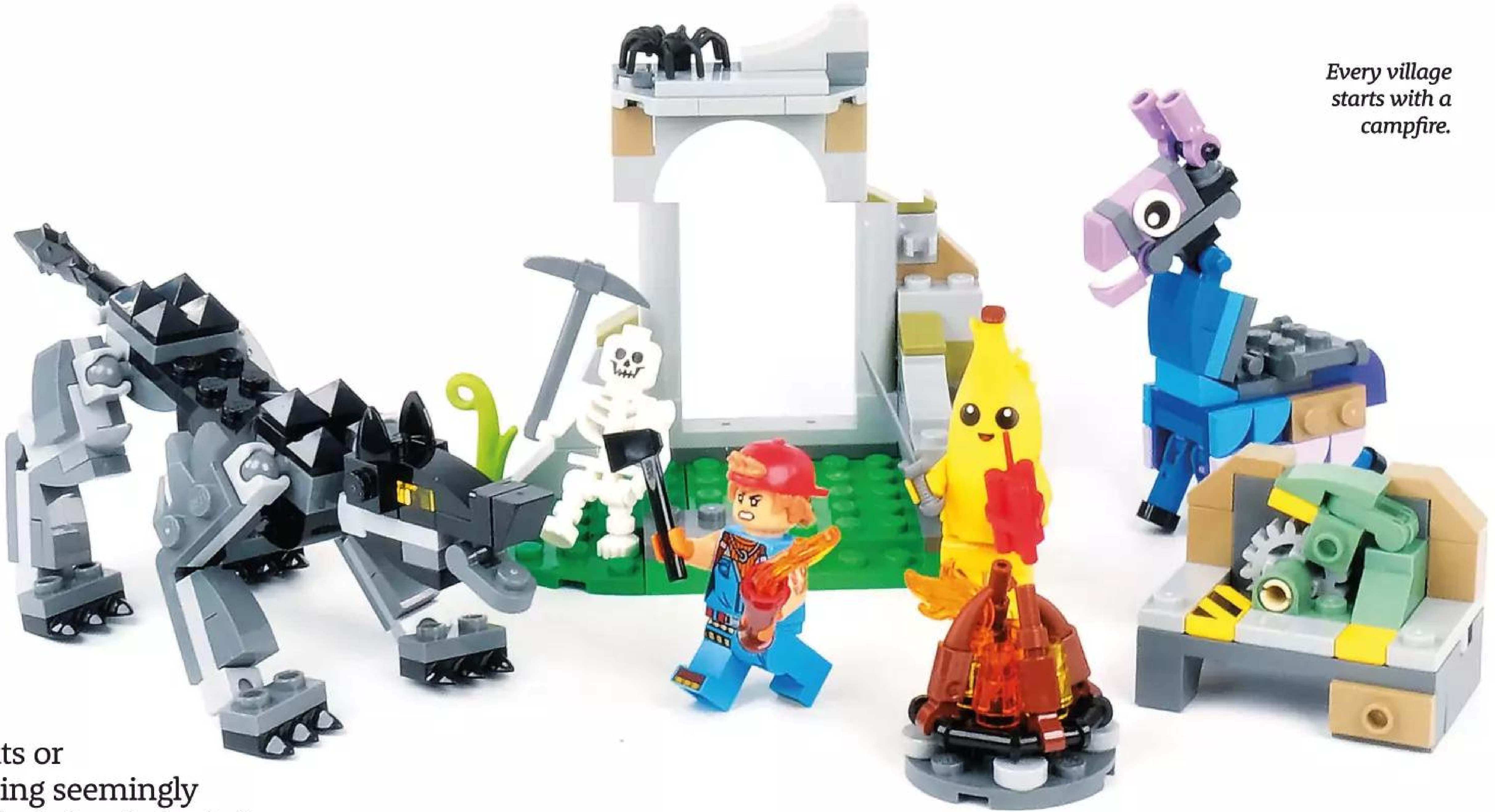
77075

Theme: Fortnite / **Price:** £17.99, $22.99, €19.99 /
Recommended age: 7+ / **Pieces:** 250 / **Minifigures:** 3



Every village starts with a campfire.

Peely & Sparkplug's Camp

Small sets often have to take shortcuts or strange approaches to offer something seemingly worthwhile in a tiny box. 77075 Peely & Sparkplug's Camp demonstrates how it should be done though, capturing the feel of LEGO Fortnite Odyssey in just 250 elements.

When you first play the game, you use a torch to stay warm and a workbench to craft your tools. You must build a fire to survive. Before long you'll have faced off against a spider, a wolf and an undead skeleton. After a bit of exploring, you'll discover a llama and receive some goodies.

All of those aspects are packed into this small package and they are super accurate. Because the game builds all of the items from actual LEGO elements, the wolf you build matches the beasts you're repeatedly chopping up on screen.

The minifigures are relevant to the game too – Sparkplug is a character who is often wandering around and ready to be recruited to your village, while Peely is a Fortnite icon. Getting a regular version of the anthropomorphic banana is a treat after getting different versions in other sets.

Given its low price and excellent representation of the game, this set is easy to recommend. It's not going to make for an amazing display, but if you have other Fortnite sets it will complement them well.

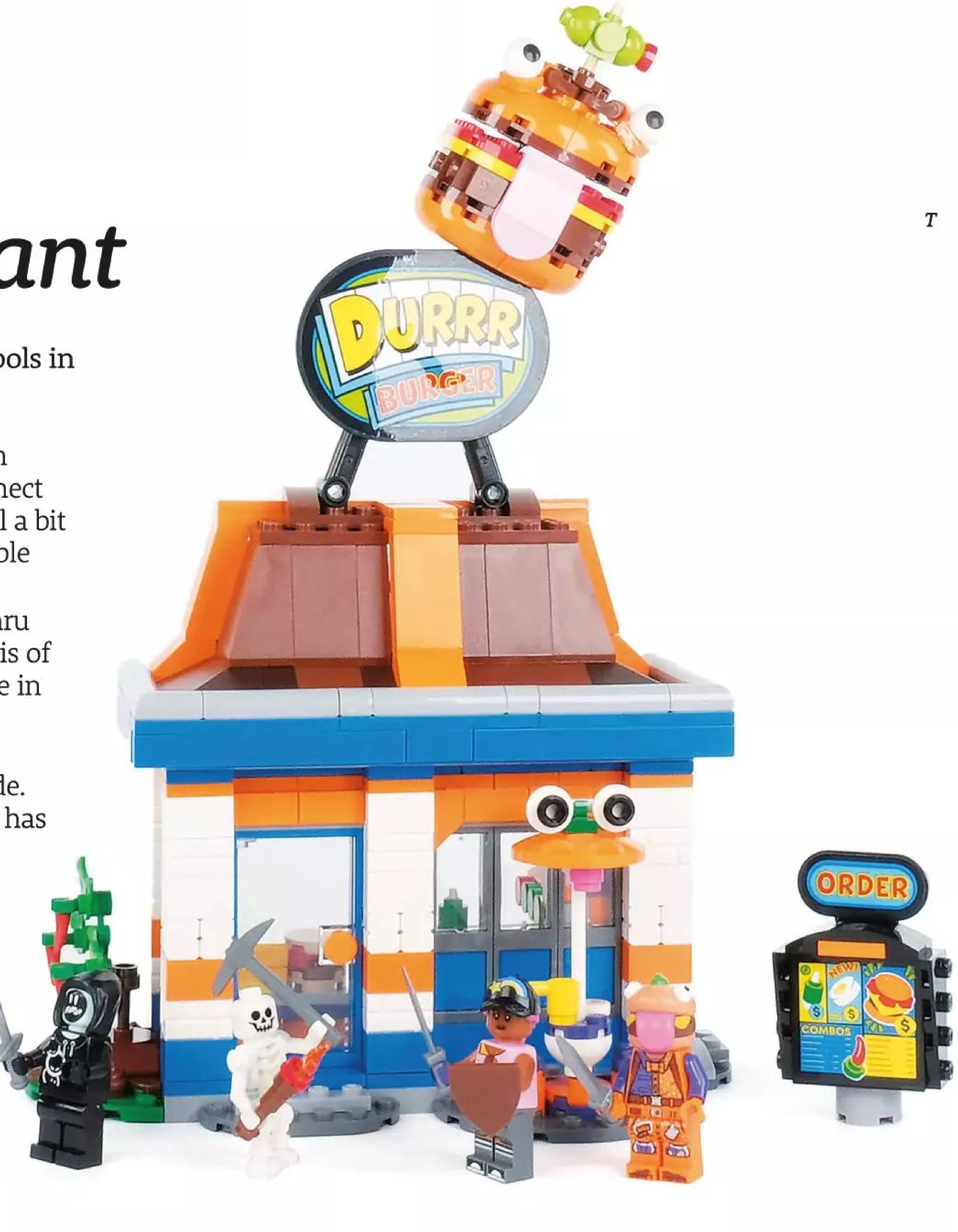
GRAHAM E. HANCOCK

Verdict **70** The essence of LEGO Fortnite Odyssey is delivered in one of the theme's smallest sets. You definitely want to add this to your collection.

77076

Theme: Fortnite / **Price:** £54.99, $64.99, €59.99 /
Recommended age: 10+ / **Pieces:** 546 / **Minifigures:** 4

Durrr Burger Restaurant



T

The Durrr Burger restaurant chain is one of the most iconic symbols in Fortnite, so 77076 is a very welcome addition to the theme.

The construction of the restaurant is really interesting. In LEGO Fornite Odyssey, you tend to not build things brick by brick, but instead in preassembled sections. This set has you build each section and then connect them, which makes it feel very authentic to the game. It makes the model a bit unstable as you're building, but it's worth it to match the feel of the playable experience.

All of the hallmarks of a fast-food joint are present, including a drive thru order point, a counter, tables and a soda machine. What makes it special is of course the massive mascot head on the top, which looks delightfully huge in person (and in a way that pictures can't quite convey).

There are some neat touches to tie the set into the game very closely, especially in the accessories – a spider enemy, dynamite sticks and a spade. The chilli bush outside is a really neat touch, as it's in the soil, implying it has been grown from a chilli seed.

Beach Bomber and Grimey are nice minifigures, but Beef Boss it the one that stands out with the excellent moulded and decorated beefburger head. It's good to see so much variety within the theme as in just its second year it has built up a decent roster of skins.

It's not a huge location for the price, but the model is slightly more parts dense than it appears in images.

GRAHAM E. HANCOCK

Verdict **64** This set is a satisfying addition to LEGO Fortnite, although not the most innovative set in the collection. It's a set to grab if you appreciate a spicy burger.

77077

Theme: Fortnite / **Price:** £89.99, $109.99, €99.99 /
Recommended age: 10+ / **Pieces:** 1,084 / **Minifigures:** 2

Klombo

Fortnite is an incredible mish mash of influences, with a huge variety of design styles and aesthetics that could only exist together in the post-internet age. The design of Klombos though stands out as something quite original within the game, thanks to the goofy look that gives the multi-legged lizards a cute and cartoony oversized head.

When Klombos were added to LEGO Fortnite, fans were thrilled to find that their visual style had translated well into digital bricks. They roam around the Plains and players can pet them, feed them and ride them.

This physical version of a LEGO Klombo is an incredibly close match to what is in the game. It's truly impressive how the design team has packed so much personality into the creature's face using angular bricks.

You might not realise how nice the finished model will look as you build it, because it starts off with a rather boxy body. In a great example of clever part usage though, roof tile elements becomes scales along the back, which gives it some curvature, then elements originally used in Elves buildings serve as scales along the edge.

As soon as you start adding the legs, the boxy sides of the body are hidden. While all six are built in a similar fashion, they are quite interesting to construct and have a really pleasing, cartoony look when they are complete.

The head comes towards the end and it is the most fun part to put together. It's really rewarding to layer plates to shape it, add rows of teeth and position the eyes in the right way. The hinging jaw gives you some options when it comes to the Klombo's expression.

Two minifigures accompany the beast – Island Adventure Peely and Oro. Island Adventure Peely is great, decorating the special element that the character uses in a new, vibrant way.

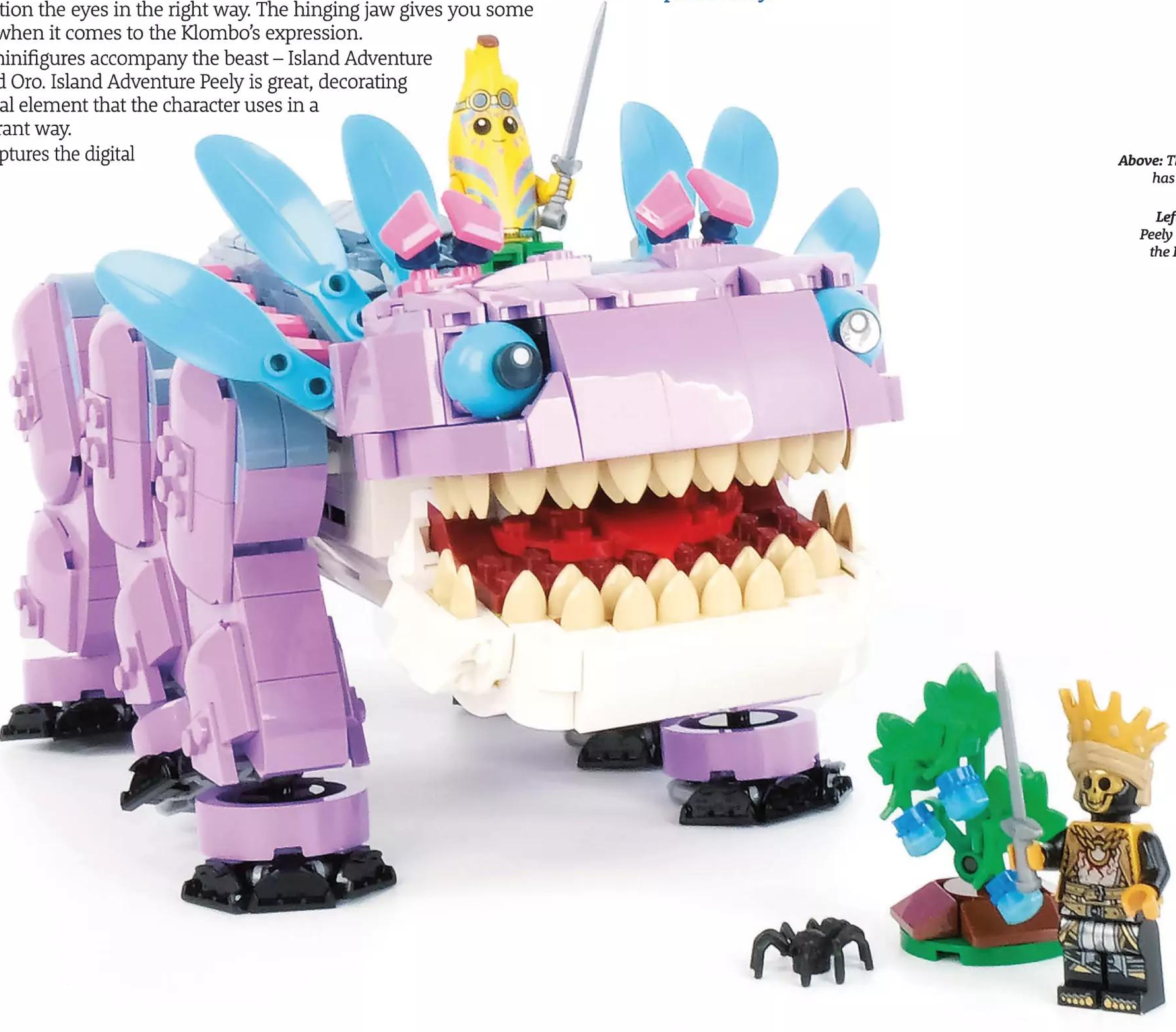
Oro captures the digital minifigure well, but it's an example of when something about the original character has been lost in translation. In the regular game, Oro's tall, lanky skeletal features are an essential part of his iconography, but the squat minifigure doesn't manage to quite get that across.

There's also a small Klomberry bush to construct – it's nice to get a relevant bit of environment.

Klombo is a really successful LEGO set, with a fun build that results in a posable model that captures the fun, playful look of the creature from LEGO Fortnite.

GRAHAM E. HANCOCK

Verdict
74
A creature that looks fabulous in digital LEGO elements also looks fabulous in physical bricks, packed with fun and personality.



Above: *The beast has six legs.*

Left: *Island Peely can ride the Klombo.*

77078

Theme: *Fortnite* / ***Price:*** *£209.99, $249.99, €229.99* /
Recommended age: *18+* / ***Pieces:*** *2,503* / ***Minifigures:*** *1*

Mecha Team Leader

When it's time to defeat the Devourer, there's only one thing to do – construct a mighty sword-wielding mech that can triumph in the Final Showdown

In Fortnite Season 9, the Devourer caused havoc, which led to a common goal to construct a mech that would defeat it. Over the course of several weeks, the mecha was under construction, with different limbs reaching completion one by one. The result was Mecha Team Leader, a massive robot that wielded the Sword of Singularity in an epic battle against the Devourer.

Given how memorable the storyline is, it is certainly worthy of a towering LEGO set. In the past few years, the LEGO Group has been pushing the boundaries of what is possible in mechs, as the figures have become taller and taller. The new Technic parts introduced in 76968 Dinosaur Fossils: Tyrannosaurus rex seem to open up new possibilities, as they allow 77078 Mecha Team Leader to be jointed yet stable.

The head, inspired by Cuddle Team Leader, is probably the most interesting and rewarding part of the build. A nice combination of angles and curved pieces ensure that it captures the shape and proportions of the game design. Similarly, the Rex arm captures the aesthetic of the design through some judicious use of elements.

Building the legs and seeing how they come together is fun, as they are very functional on the inside but are decorated with vibrant colours on the outside. The highlight is, once again, the character aspects – putting together the feet that are in fact the heads of Beef Boss and Tomatohead.

The torso is incredibly well structured, especially considering there is a cockpit inside. There is plenty of space for a minifigure, yet the walls around it – and the structure outside of them – give the body of Mecha Team Leader the correct shape to match the source material. The car elements used as the front panels in pink work really well.

It would be a big omission if the Sword of Singularity were not included and it's a great change of pace from the rest of the build. It's quite simple, but it is great fun to sideways build a sci-fi sword, right down to the plain minifigure head and wig used to complete the hilt.

The different styles and colours that make up the mech are part of what makes this a really engaging build, as you are constantly changing up the types of pieces you are using and the colour combinations.

When complete, it is a gloriously large, chunky mech. It has real display presence thanks to its hulking size and quite a polished look. The wild combination of Rex, Beef Boss, Tomatohead, Drift and Cuddle Team Leader looks really striking and fun.

There are some limitations though that are quite frustrating – the Rex arm has an elbow joint but can't be rotated, so it is perpetually side on. It would be much better if the lower arm had a rotating joint so that you could position in different directions.

A classic LEGO limitation is found in the lack of knee joints too. Given that this is an 18+ model, it doesn't seem like there is a good reason to omit them. Yes, the hip joints offer quite a bit of flexibility, but they are no substitute for also incorporating knee joints.

Unlike some other mechs, there are a few connections that are not as solid as you would like. When moving the model, certain pieces pop off, which is of course unwelcome and a little frustrating – especially as it looks like a giant action figure and you would like it to behave as such.

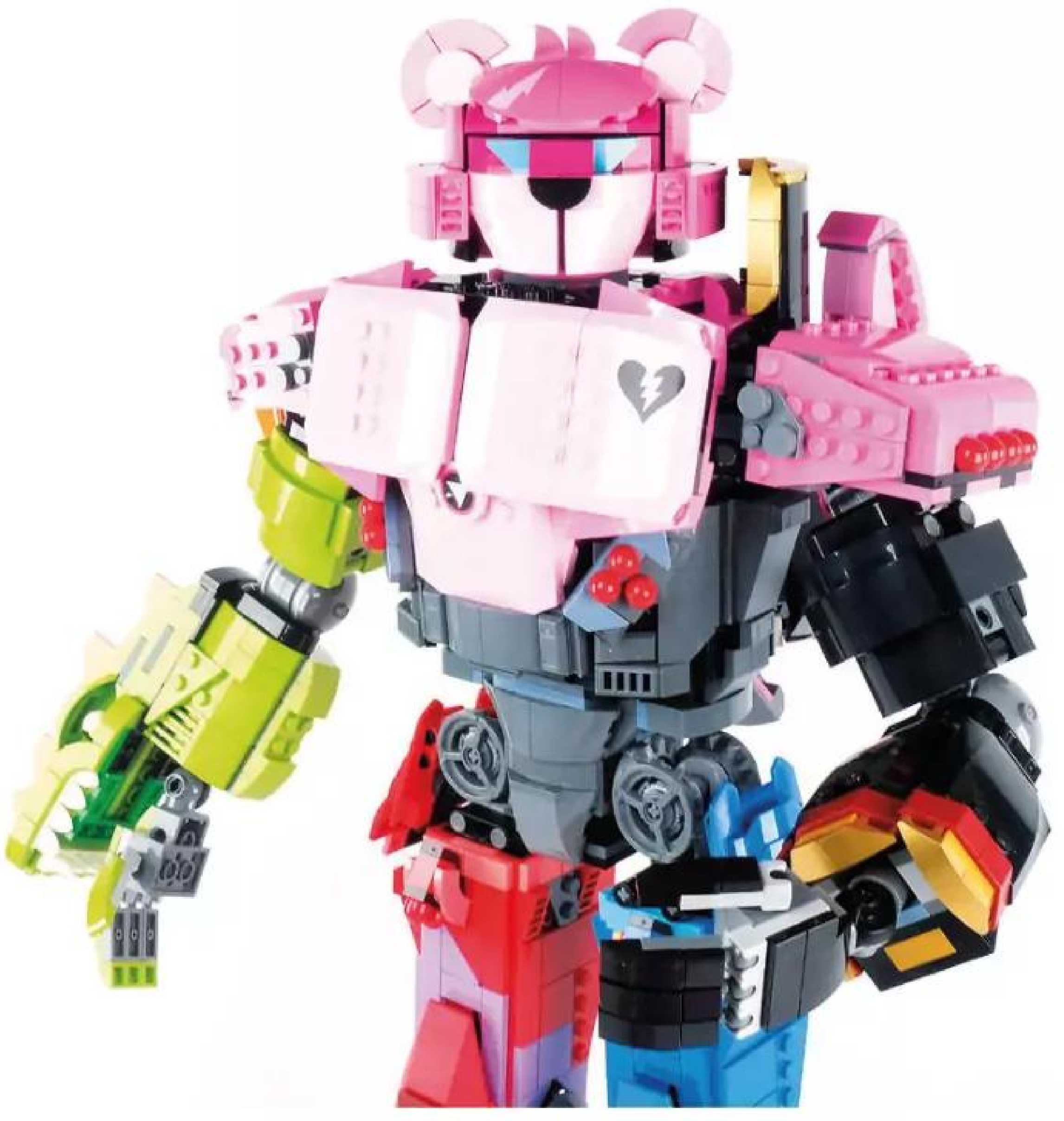
There is a single minifigure in the box – a tiny version of Mecha Team Leader. The decoration is exquisite, with intricate printing on the unique moulded head element. Tiny details are printed on the torso assembly (including the arms) and on the legs. The best touch of all might be the feet, which feature faces to match the large-scale Mecha Team Leader.

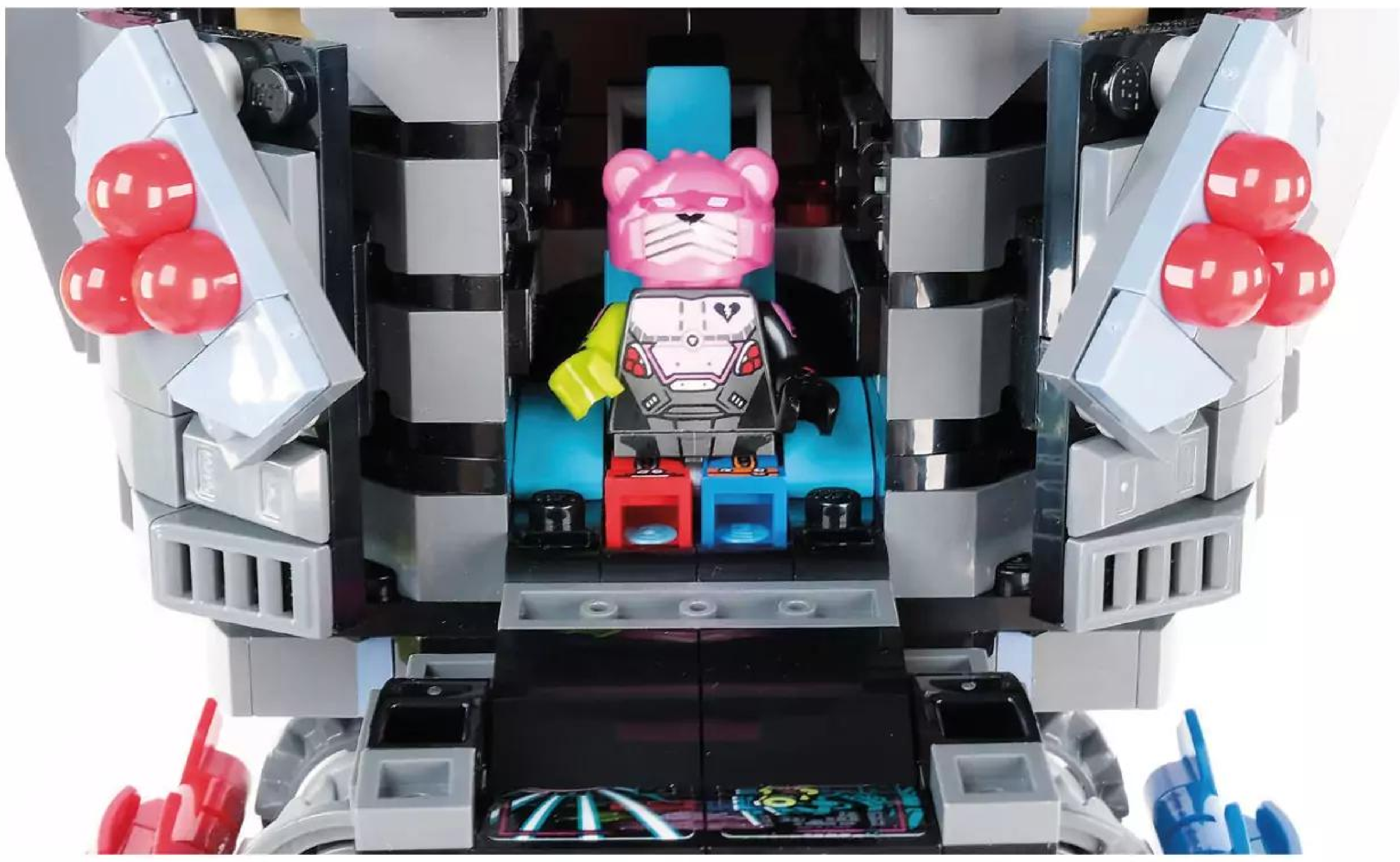
As with other LEGO Fortnite sets, you do get some relevant digital unlocks within the game – the regular skin, the brick version, the jet pack accessory and metal versions of all three. It's a nice value add, but of course not something that you'll take into consideration when buying a set of this size.

When it comes to the size of mechs, the bar has been raised – but the LEGO Group should continue to innovate and find ways to make giant figures like this more posable. Fans of Fortnite though will enjoy having this iconography captured in a detailed display set, more than worthy of a place on the shelf.

GRAHAM E. HANCOCK

Verdict
82
It's still incredible that the LEGO design team can deliver mechs of this size – and that they keep improving. This is the ultimate Fortnite display set.



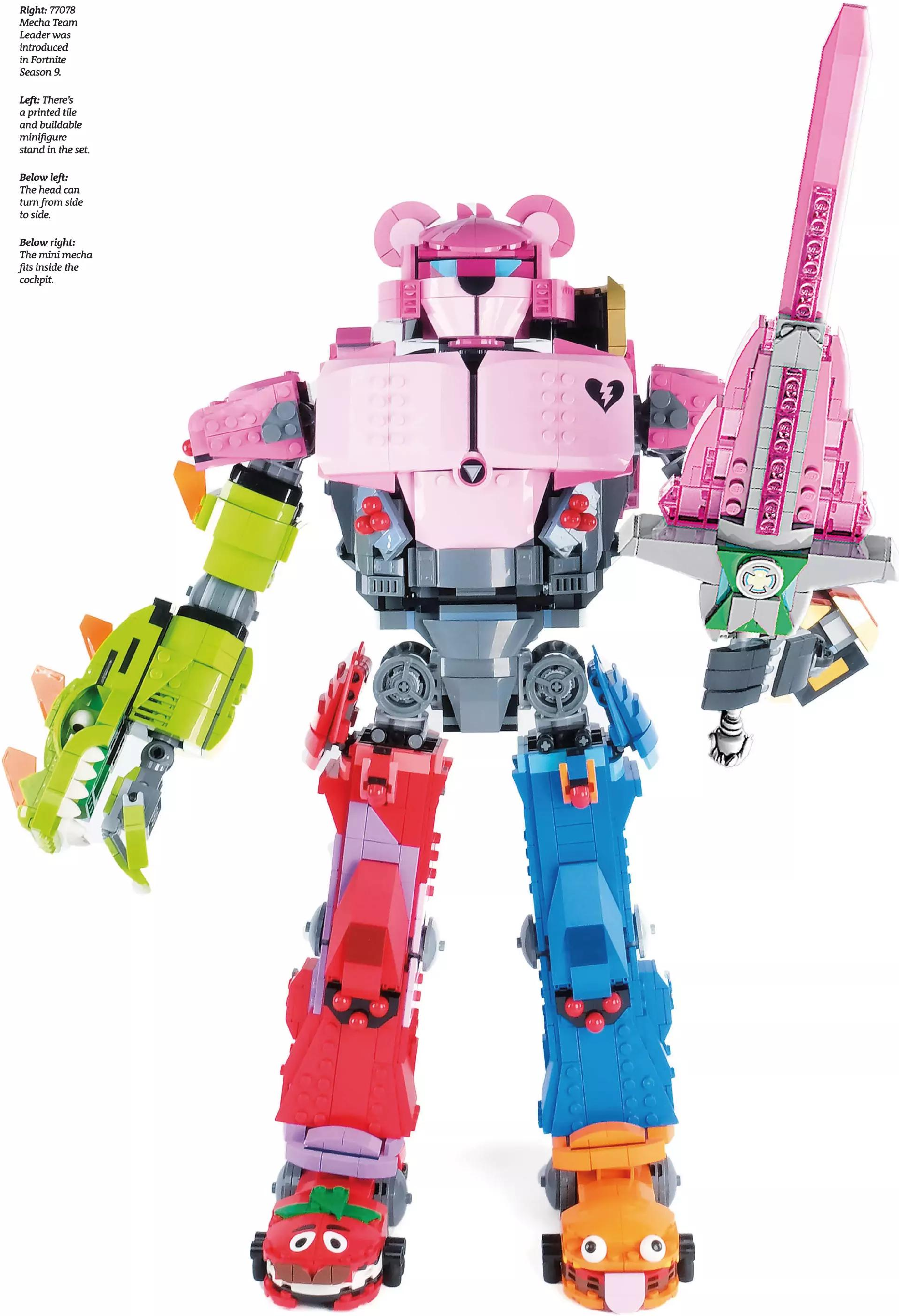


__Right:__ 77078 Mecha Team Leader was introduced in Fortnite Season 9.

__Left:__ There's a printed tile and buildable minifigure stand in the set.

__Below left:__ The head can turn from side to side.

__Below right:__ The mini mecha fits inside the cockpit.



76317

Theme: Marvel / **Price:** £44.99, $54.99, €49.99 /
Recommended age: 8+ / **Pieces:** 394 / **Minifigures:** 4

Peter Parker's Apartment

Renting a rundown apartment to crash out in between saving the city and keeping up with the Daily Bugle's deadlines, Peter Parker's home is not exactly luxury living. Unfortunately, 76317 Peter Parker's Apartment takes this idea way too seriously.

While it's understandable that the designers wanted to stick to the theme of Peter struggling to balance multiple part-time jobs when he's not web slinging between skyscrapers, this has led to a space that offers no incentive for play.

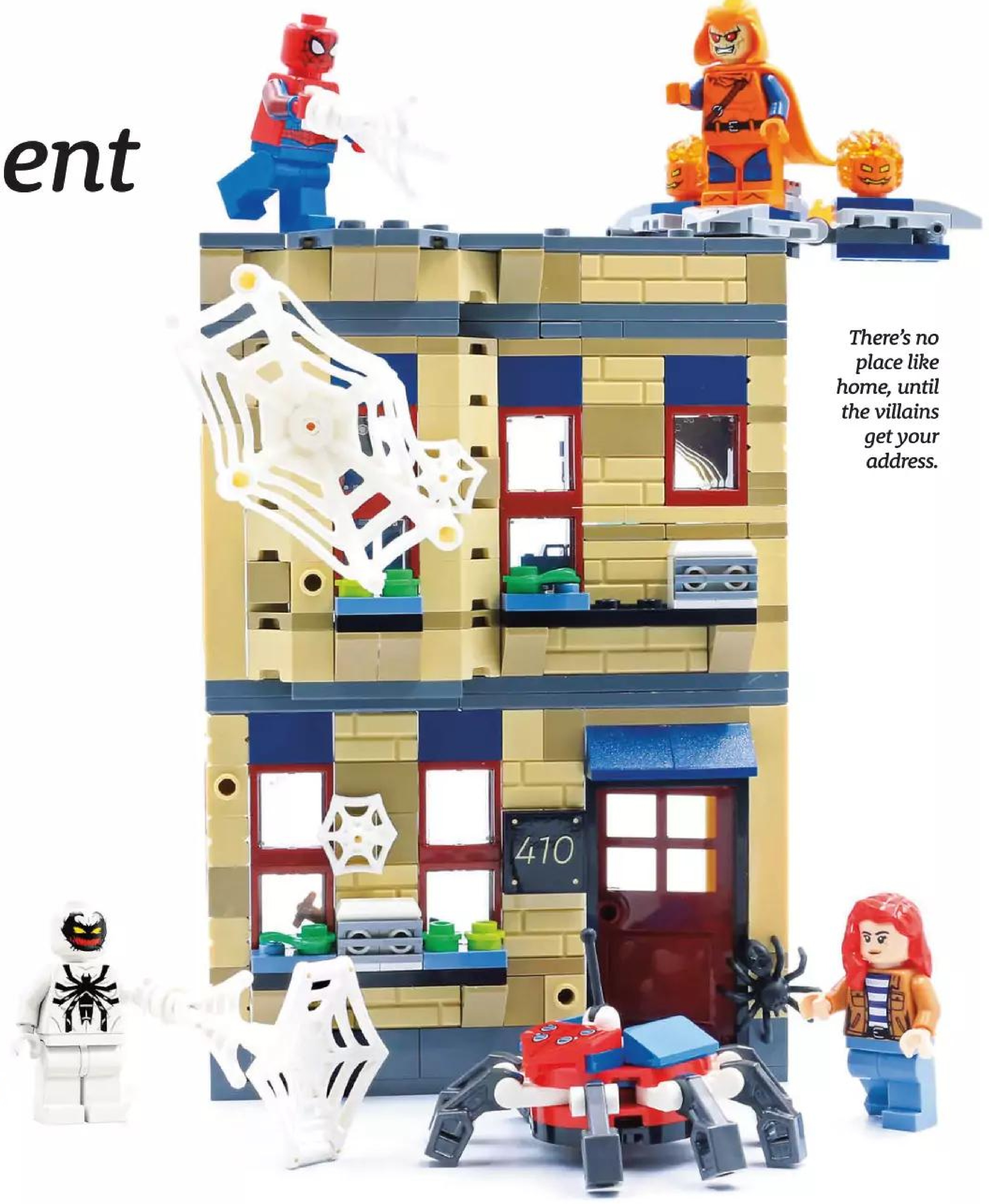
A tiny kitchenette is just big enough for Mary-Jane to visit. Upstairs, the office-meets-bedroom is similarly bare, with only Peter's trusty camera and a fold out bed. There are some nice touches on the sticker sheet, which references the science fair and Oscorp.

Hobgoblin comes in the set with his glider and there's a collapsing wall, suggesting he has deployed a pumpkin bomb. The scale of the villain's vehicle demonstrates how tiny the apartment is. All of the minifigures are excellent, especially an unusual villain like Hobgoblin.

It's a very underwhelming set and its fiddly to play with because of its scale. It's a shame as previous homes of heroes in the LEGO Marvel theme, like 76108 Sanctum Sanctorum Showdown, have focused on achieving a building that's realistic as well as fun. If fans have already grabbed 76308 Spider-Man Mech vs. Anti-Venom for the minifigures, then there's really not much to recommend this one unless you're an avid Hobgoblin collector.

KAT REES-JAUKE

Verdict
45
Considering apartment is in the title, there's very little space to call home – not even a microwave to reheat the pizza. Everything is about the showdown.



There's no place like home, until the villains get your address.

76321

Theme: Marvel / **Price:** £44.99, $54.99, €59.99 /
Recommended age: 9+ / **Pieces:** 393 / **Minifigures:** 4

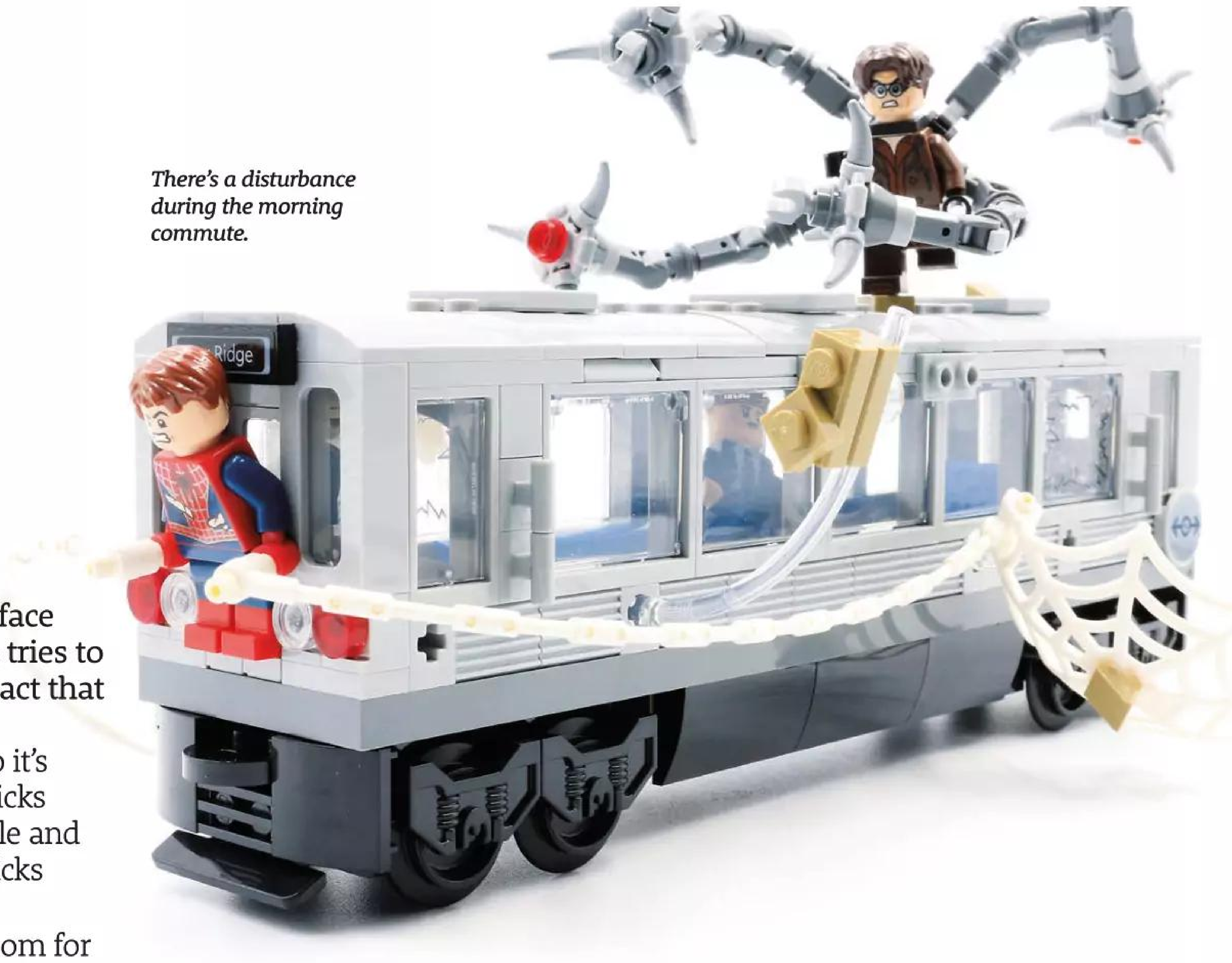
Spider-Man vs. Doc Ock

As Doc Ock tries to escape from Spider-Man, the two face off on the subway tracks around New York. Doc Ock tries to derail a car in order to escape, leading to a dramatic act that is one of the most memorable scenes in Spider-Man 2.

A new 6x28 baseplate acts as the floor for the subway car, so it's accurately scaled compared to the minifigures. Textured 1x2 bricks line both sides, perfectly imitating the metal shell for the vehicle and matching the movie reference. There are also a few Technic bricks scattered around for webs to attach to later.

The interior is fairly cramped though, with barely enough room for minifigures to sit across the carriage. There's certainly not enough space for Aunt May to do her knitting. Some curved bricks suggest seating, but it doesn't stretch the entirety of the car. All of the focus is on the exterior, which is fair, as that's where Spider-Man and Doc Ock battle, but having more space on the inside would have been nice for play.

All of the minifigures are unique to this set, including the very detailed Doc Ock and J. Jonah Jameson with a suitably unperturbed expression. Spider-Man's suit is torn up from the fight and he can stretch himself across the front of the subway car to try and use webs to keep it on the tracks.



There's a disturbance during the morning commute.

It's a great interpretation of the scene, but having some more space inside and additional characters to save would make this set even better.

KAT REES-JAUKE

Verdict
58
A great recreation of this iconic scene lacks some opportunity for heroism, as Spider-Man only has to save two people.

76326

Theme: *Marvel /* ***Price:*** *£54.99, $59.99, €59.99 /*
Recommended age: *18+ /* ***Pieces:*** *379 /* ***Minifigures:*** *1*

Iron Spider-Man Bust

Introduced in Spider-Man: Homecoming, the Iron Spider suit combines Tony Stark's technology with Peter Parker's unique spidery aesthetic. Its spider-like arms and nanotechnology give the hero an extra edge when facing villains like Doc Ock. Yet considering the details and intricacies of this suit, there's nothing about this set that will have fans swinging through the streets to a toy shop.

Its style is clearly inspired by collectible figurines, such as the mini busts manufactured by Gentle Giant, with the focus on capturing the key elements that make the character recognisable. Collectible figurines have the advantage of being sculpted to depict all of these intricacies, which is far more difficult to achieve with the LEGO System.

The build process is interesting, but nowhere near the premium experience that is usually associated with 18+ sets. In fact it's almost like building a BrickHeadz set. Tiles and plates cover exposed studs and the bust is built up slowly in sections. There is clever use of hinges to slope the shoulders and the resulting model barely has any visible studs.

All of the elements are printed and they add some much-needed spider detail to the head. The decoration looks quite three dimensional, which is helped by the eye tiles being angled on minifigure posing pieces. A Technic rod attaches the head to the neck, allowing for some tilted expressions. Technic is also used on the arms that stretch above Spider-Man's back, though they are noticeably missing one joint compared to how they appear in the movie.

The scale also stands out when the head is attached. It's not quite right. The shoulders should be three head-widths (a very common measurement in portraiture) and this head is slightly too small to meet that scale. That is because of the scale of the model, which is too small to really capture any convincing details.

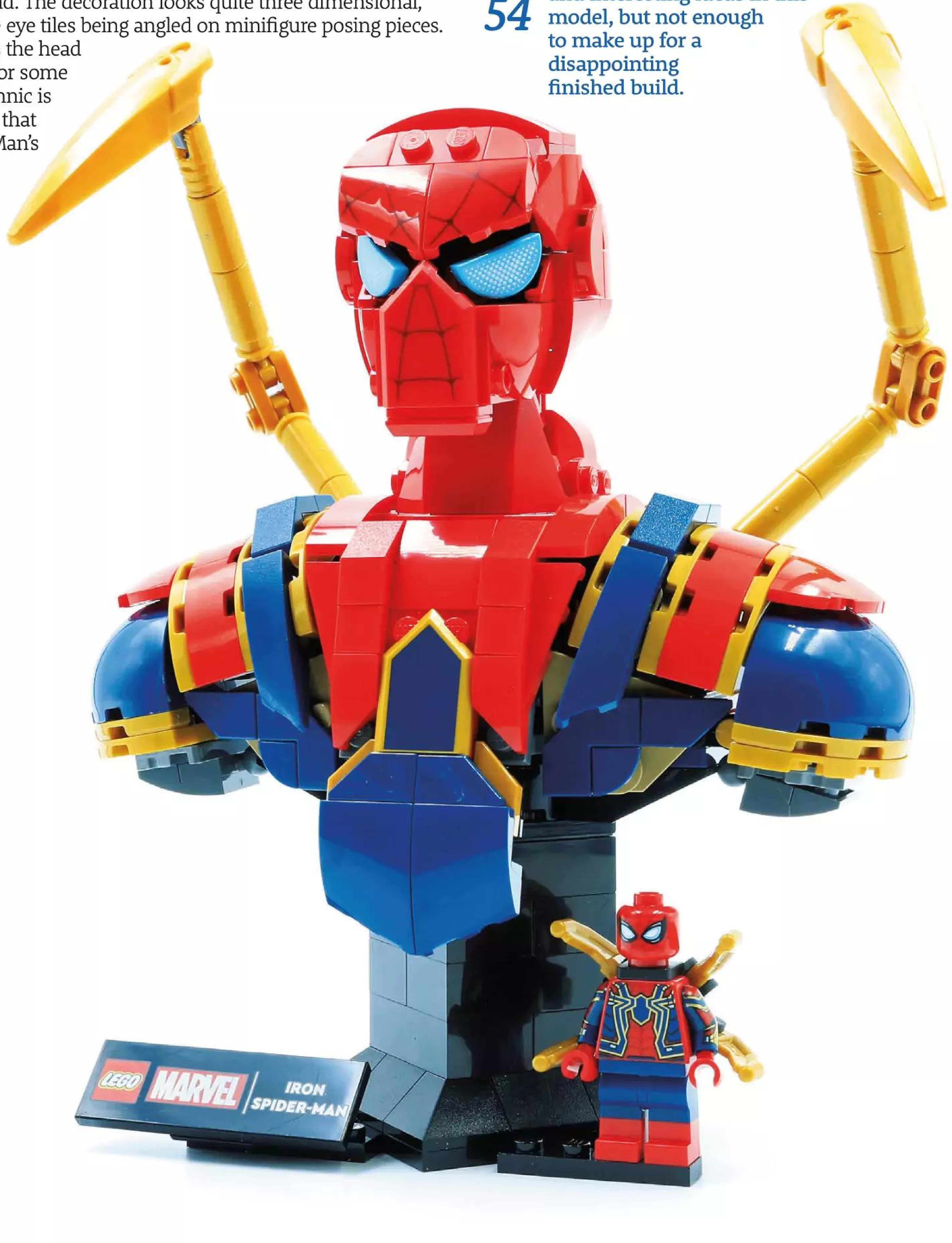
Even the exclusive minifigure isn't very unique because it's a slightly updated version of the Spider-Man that comes in 76323 Avengers: Endgame Final Battle. Some arm printing does not justify getting this set solely for Spidey.

Nothing about the finished set makes it a worthy display piece… it easily gets lost on a shelf. 76326 Iron Spider-Man Bust fails to achieve its intended use

KAT REES-JAUKE

Verdict
54

There are some good techniques and interesting ideas in this model, but not enough to make up for a disappointing finished build.



Busting out the nanotechnology.

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Theme: *Board game* / ***Price:*** *£19.99, $19.99, €19.99* /
Recommended age: *7+* / ***Pieces:*** *48* / ***Minifigures:*** *0*

Brick Like This!

FAST TALKING & FUN BUILDING!
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BRICK LIKE THIS!
A LEGO® PARTY GAME
7+ 2-8 15'
5
6
7
8

The game includes all of the bricks you need to play.

It's very refreshing to see the LEGO Group and Asmodee follow up the excellent Monkey Palace with something entirely different. Brick Like This! is very much in the party game genre, a casual game that you can bring out when friends are visiting that requires minimal setup.

The rules are super simple. Players split into pairs and in each team one player describes, one builds. The card shows a brick-built pattern and the builder has to construct it without looking at the card. Challenge cards make it tougher by adding a fun level of confusion to the task. After several rounds, the team that has successfully matched the most patterns wins the game.

Different cards are worth different numbers of points – so if you're handy with the bricks, you can tackle more challenging patterns and trickier challenge cards.

What works so well about the game though is that it is very approachable no matter what your skill level. If you are playing with other deep fans, you can use all of the appropriate terminology – 1x2 slope, 1x2 brick with hole et cetera – but if you are playing with friends or family, you quickly discover they create their own words as they don't know the 'correct' names for the elements. This adds to the fun and chaos.

And that is what makes this game so successful. Unlike Monkey Palace, where the clever mechanics make the game work so well and feel so rewarding, here it's the jovial atmosphere that it creates that makes it so great to play. You can't help but laugh and at times get frustrated as you are trying to instruct without speaking, or some other nonsense.

Each challenge has been well conceived, although of course some are harder than others. Not being able to say the word 'on' is easy to work around, but not being able to speak at all requires much more thought. The game definitely tests the communication skills of the players, who might not be as simpatico as they thought they were.

The only drawback to this game is that there are not more cards. Hopefully it will be successful enough to warrant expansion packs, as it really is a great way to get friends and family to so something LEGO brick related, or as an ice breaker when you want an activity to do with other LEGO fans.

GRAHAM E. HANCOCK

Brick Like This! demonstrates how broad a category 'LEGO board game' really is. It's fun and fast paced – great for fans and non-fans alike to play together.

90-100	*An exceptional set that does something special, original or innovative.*
80-90	*A top tier LEGO set that is close to perfect, showing what the System can do.*
70-80	*Strongly recommended, a very good LEGO set providing a really enjoyable build.*
60-70	*A decent set that will offer a satisfying experience, but may have a few flaws.*
50-60	*Still recommended by Blocks, but expect an average and pedestrian build.*
40-50	*Perhaps worth buying, but a set that falls below the usual high LEGO standards.*
25-40	*A disappointing set that might have some redeeming qualities.*
1-25	*A set that's only for the dedicated collectors; there are many better options.*

REVIEWED **THIS MONTH**

STAR WARS
K-2SO

SET	THEME	SCORE
41843 Family Christmas Tree Decoration	Family	80
10361 Holiday Express Train	Icons	65
40820 Up-Scaled Santa Minifigure	Seasonal	79
40809 Festive Gingerbread House	Seasonal	64
40806 Gingerbread AT-AT Walker	Star Wars	80
75419 Death Star	Star Wars	92
75428 Battle Droid with STAP	Star Wars	50
75434 K-2SO	Star Wars	84
43264 Toy Story Celebration Train & RC Car	Disney	57
43277 Cruella De Vil's Car	Disney	72
75636 Windmill Village Hut	ONE PIECE	62
75639 The Going Merry Pirate Ship	ONE PIECE	83
75637 Buggy the Clown's Circus Tent	ONE PIECE	65
75638 Battle at Arlong Park	ONE PIECE	42
75640 The Baratie Floating Restaurant	ONE PIECE	76
21361 Gremlins: Gizmo	Ideas	88
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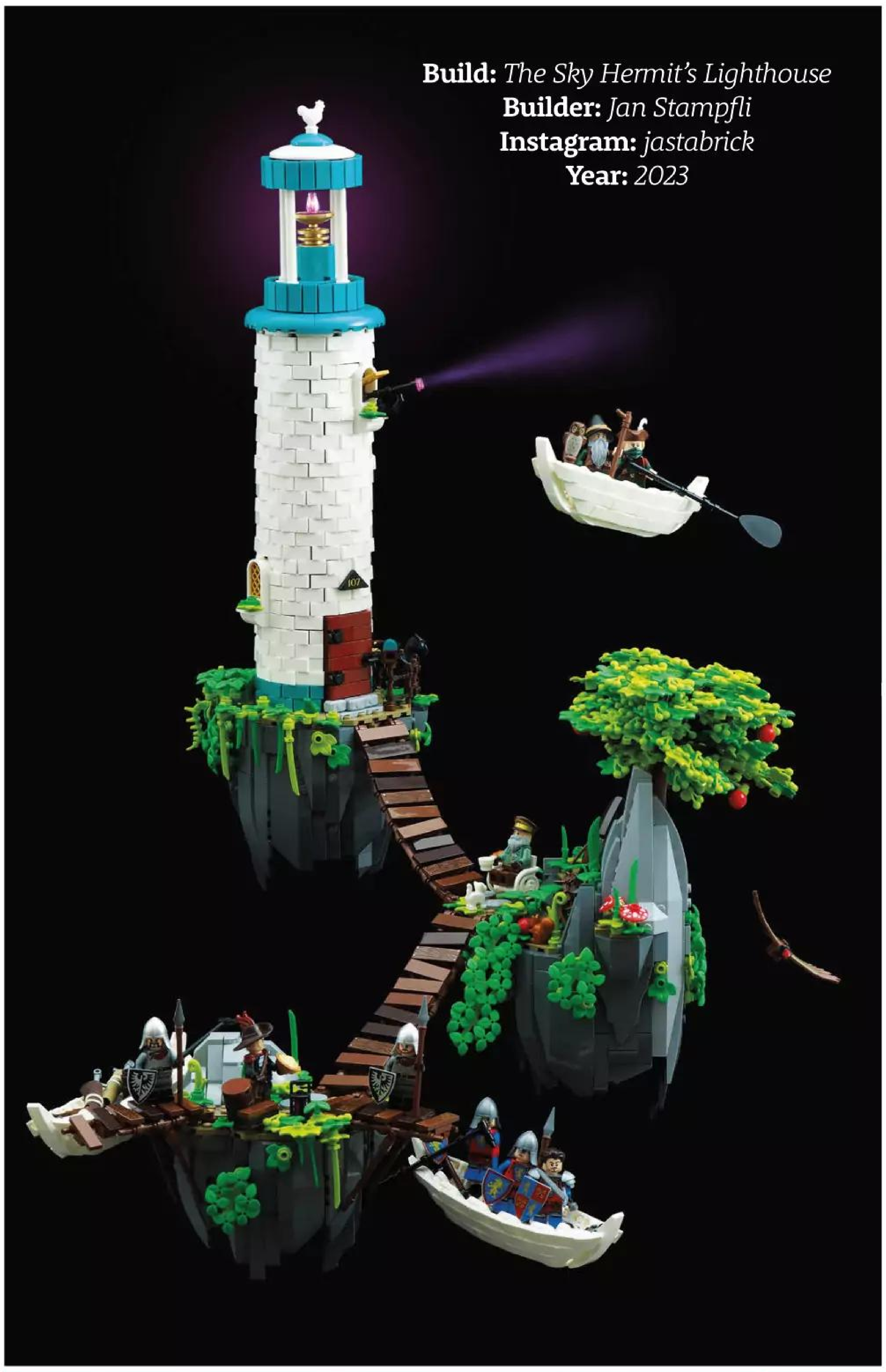
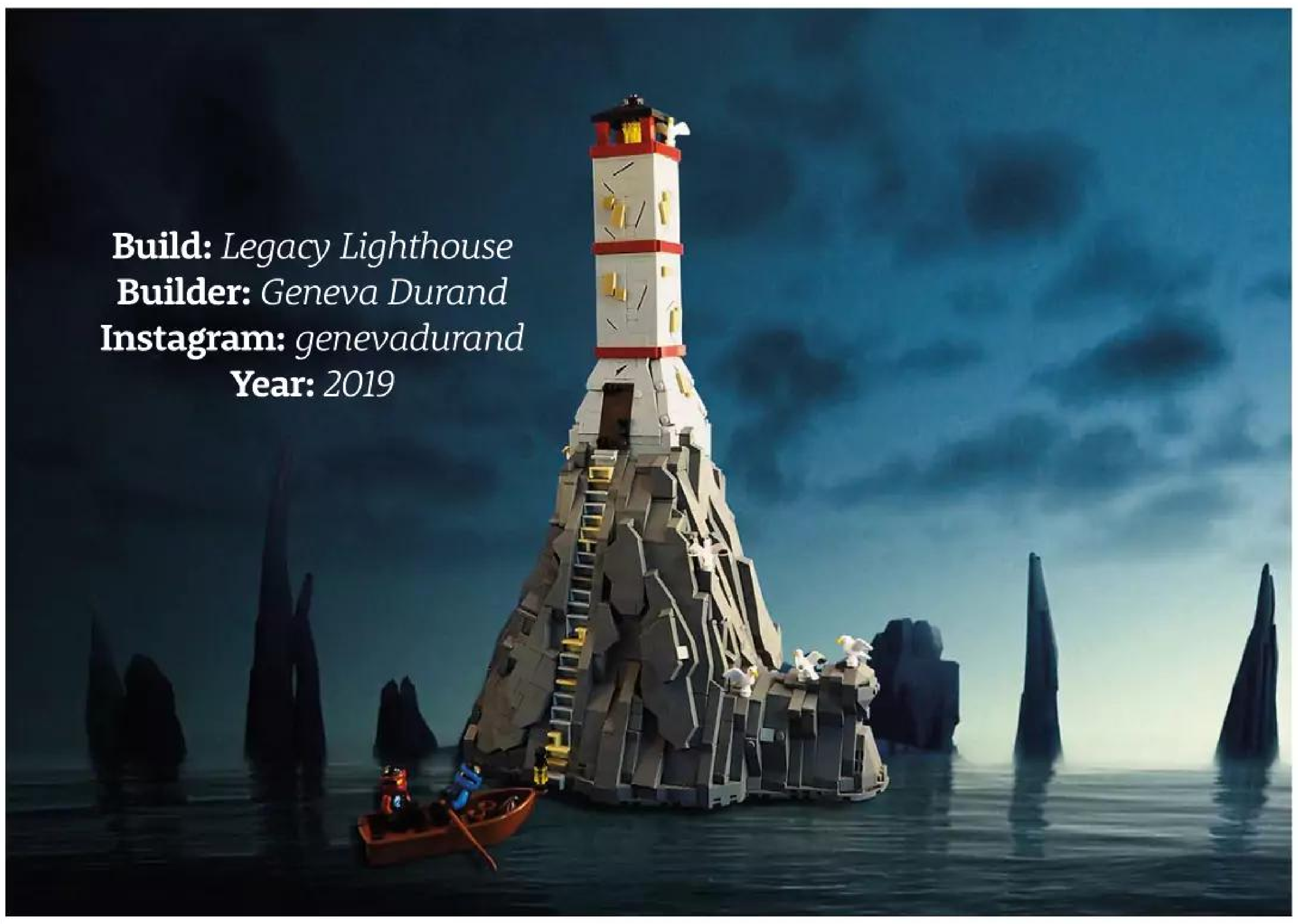
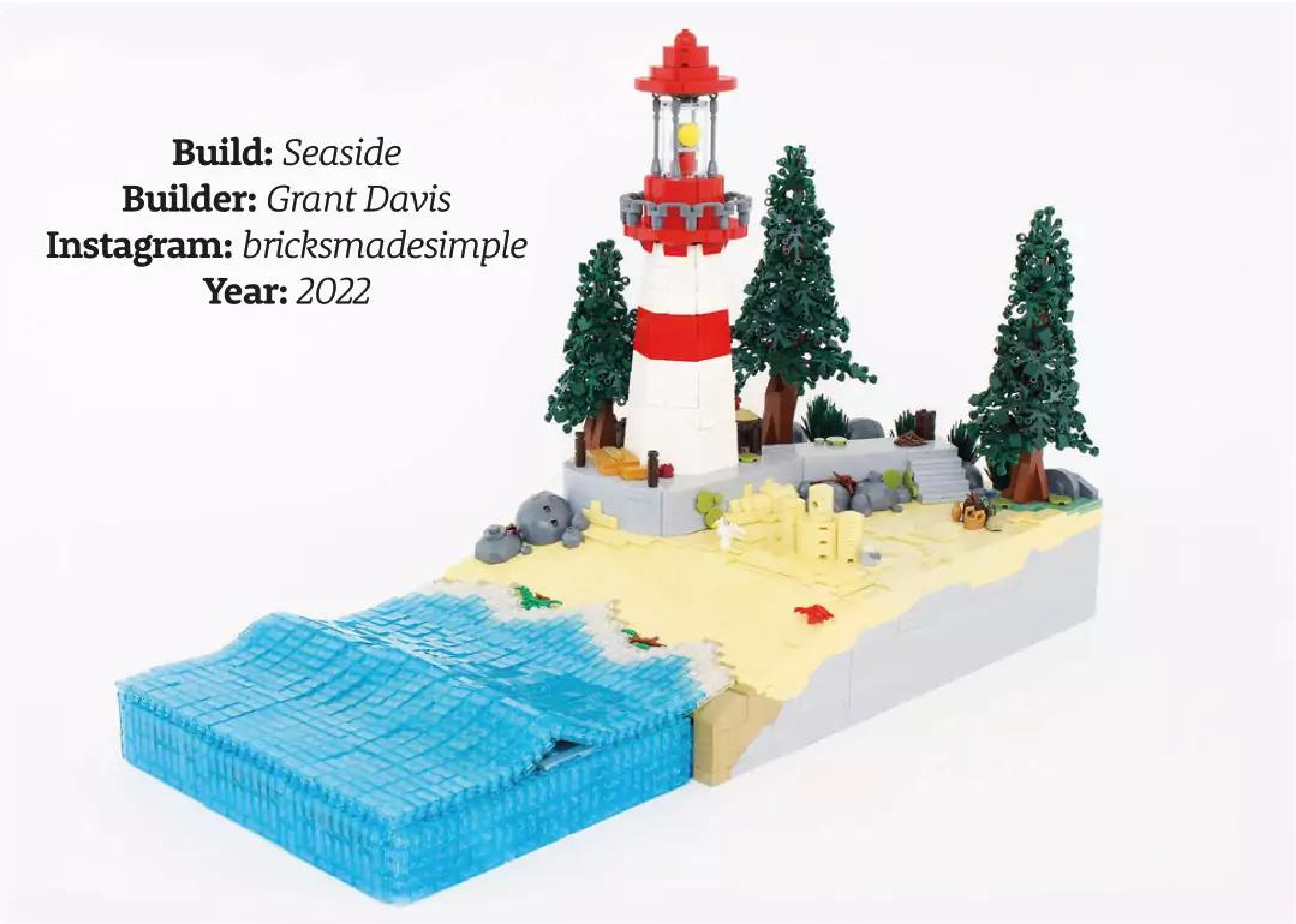


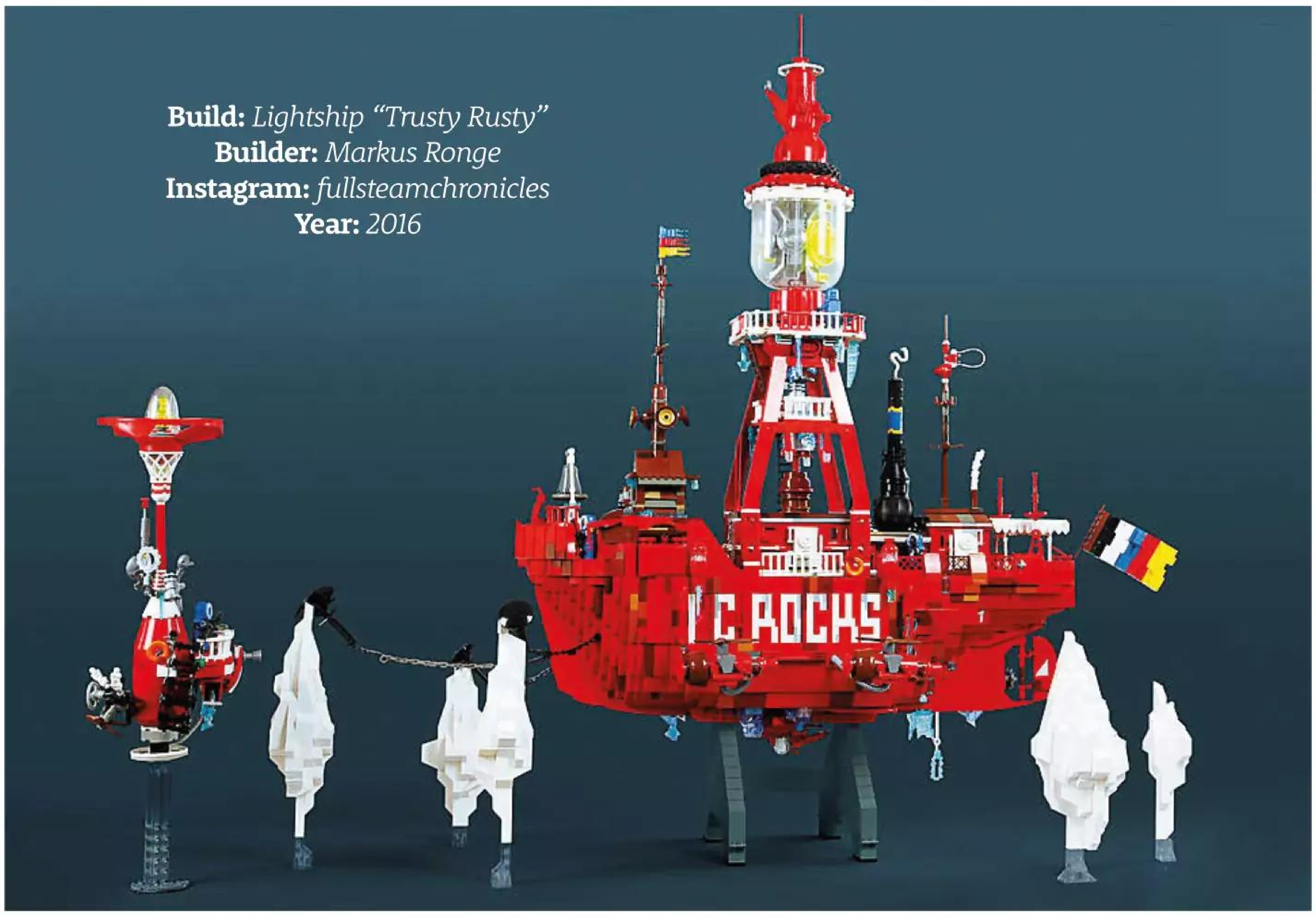
Build: *The Sky Hermit's Lighthouse*
Builder: *Jan Stampfli*
Instagram: *jastabrick*
Year: *2023*



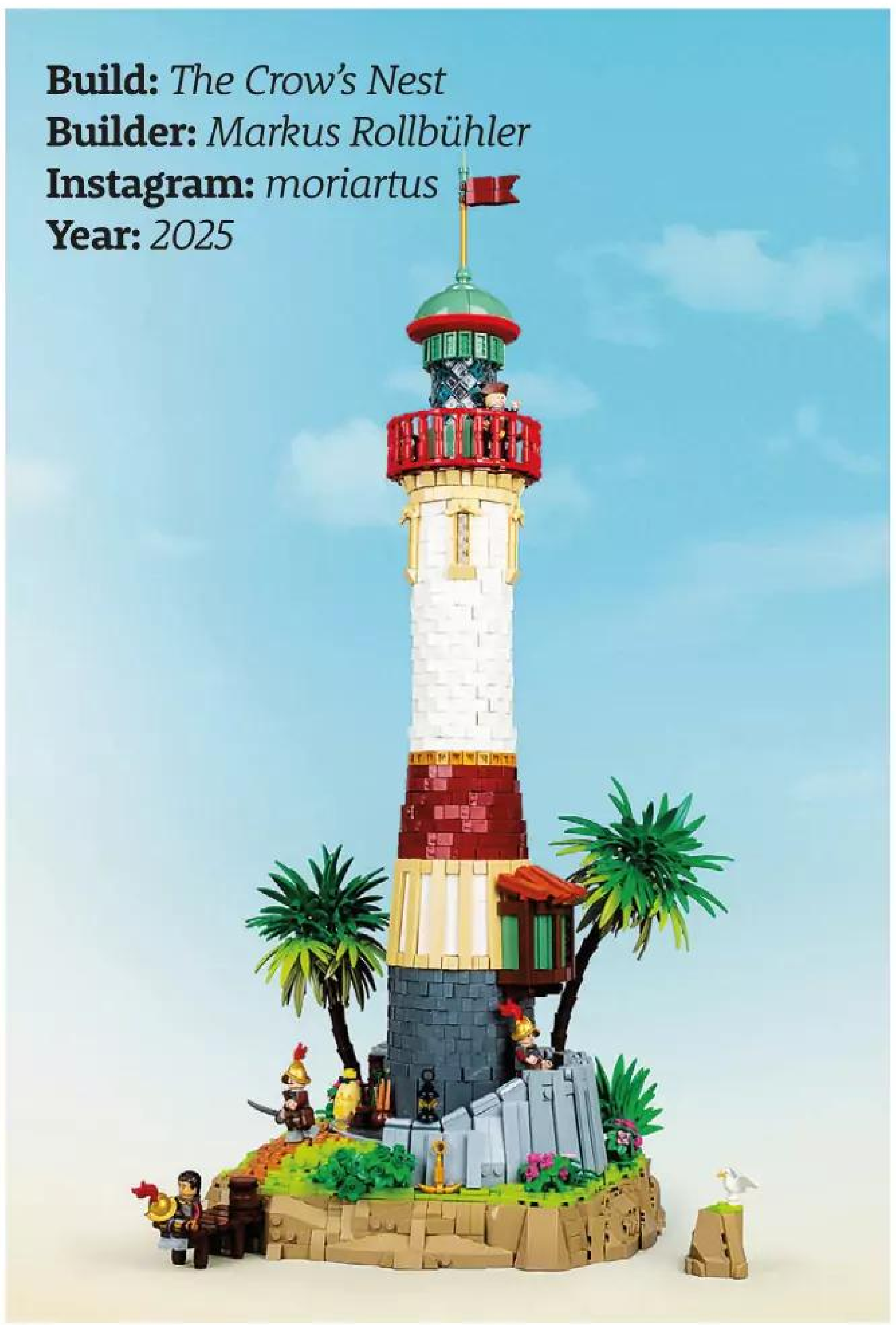
Build: *Legacy Lighthouse*
Builder: *Geneva Durand*
Instagram: *genevadurand*
Year: *2019*



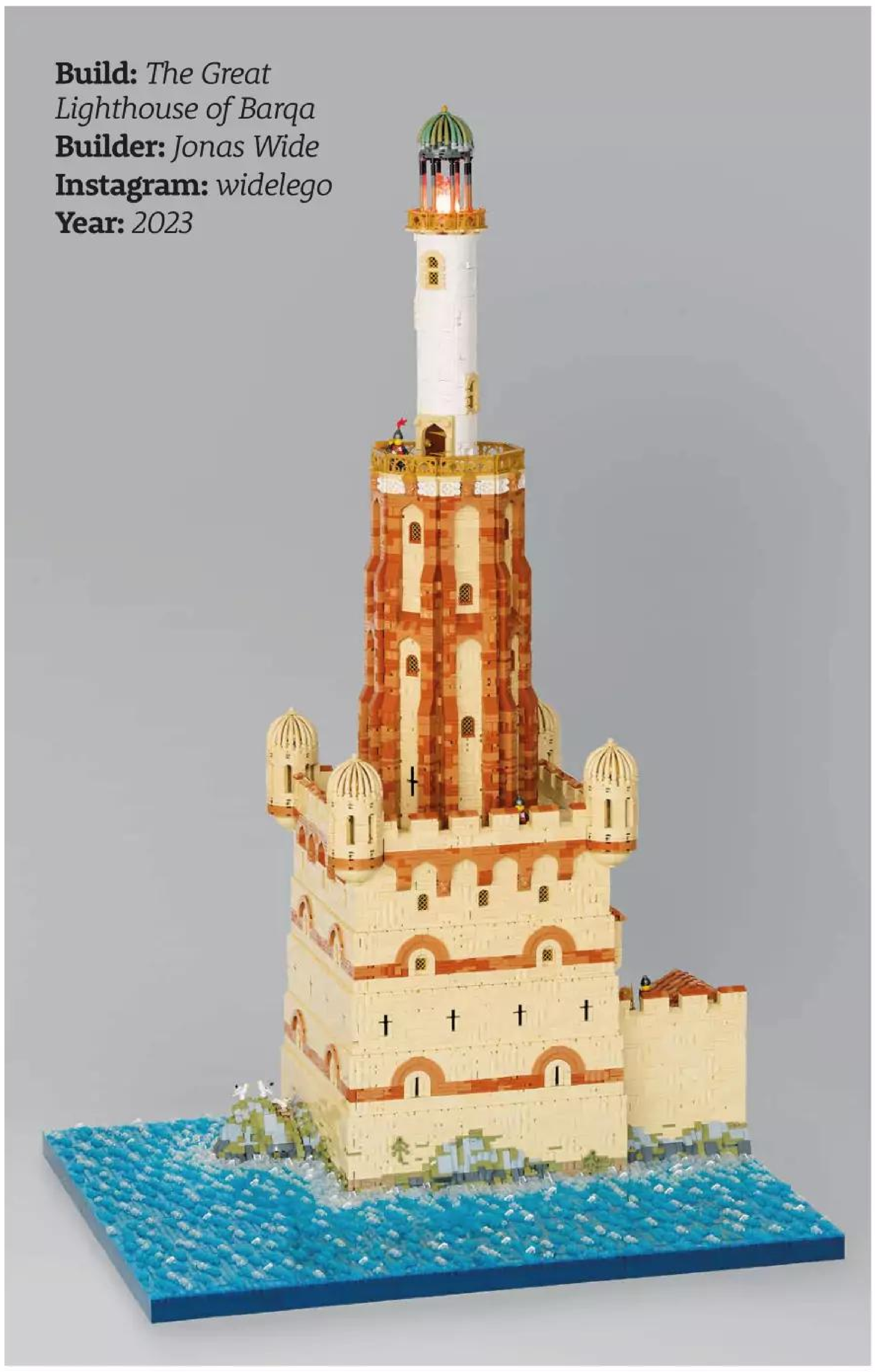
Build: *Seaside*
Builder: *Grant Davis*
Instagram: *bricksmadesimple*
Year: *2022*



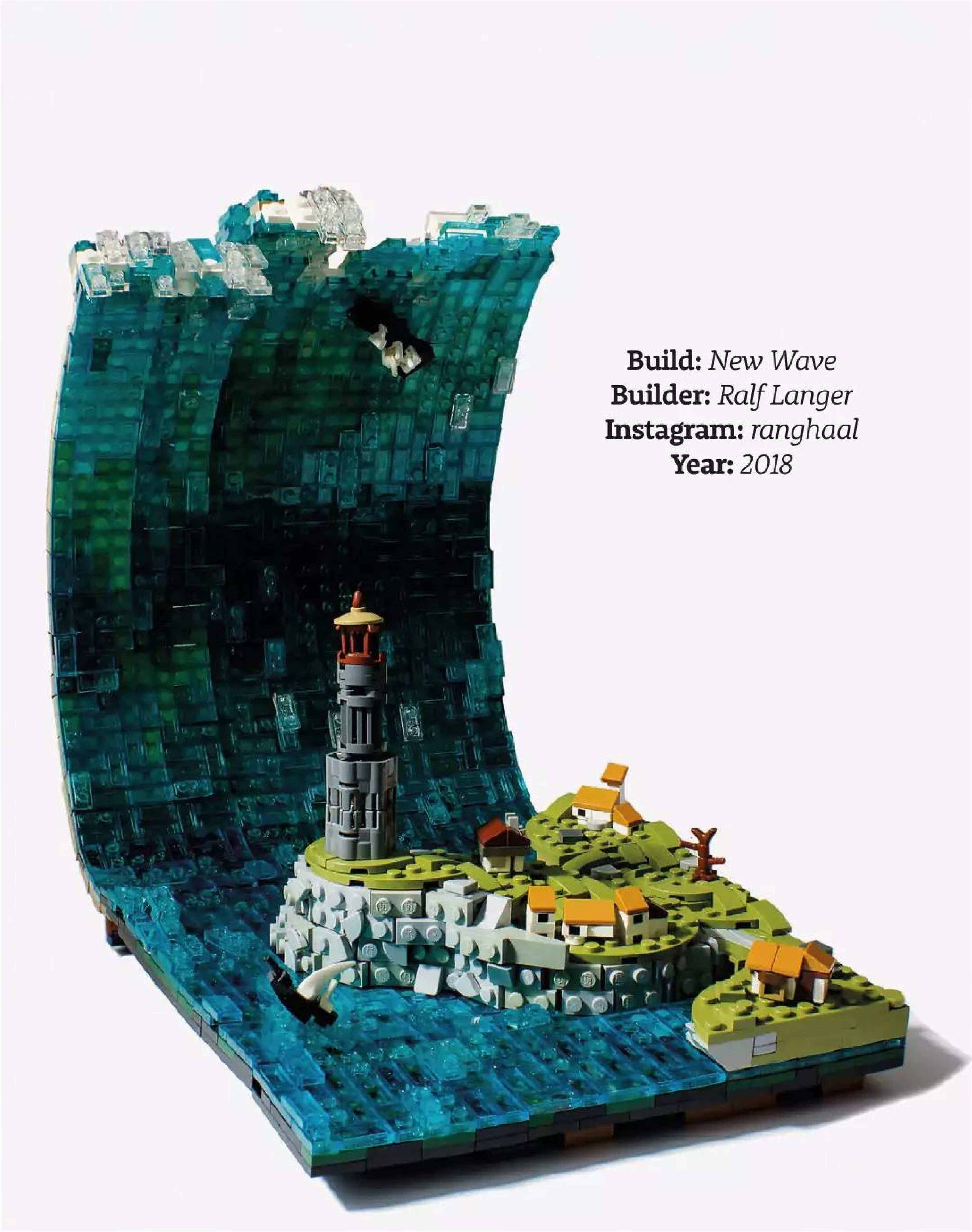
Build: *Lightship "Trusty Rusty"*
Builder: *Markus Ronge*
Instagram: *fullsteamchronicles*
Year: *2016*



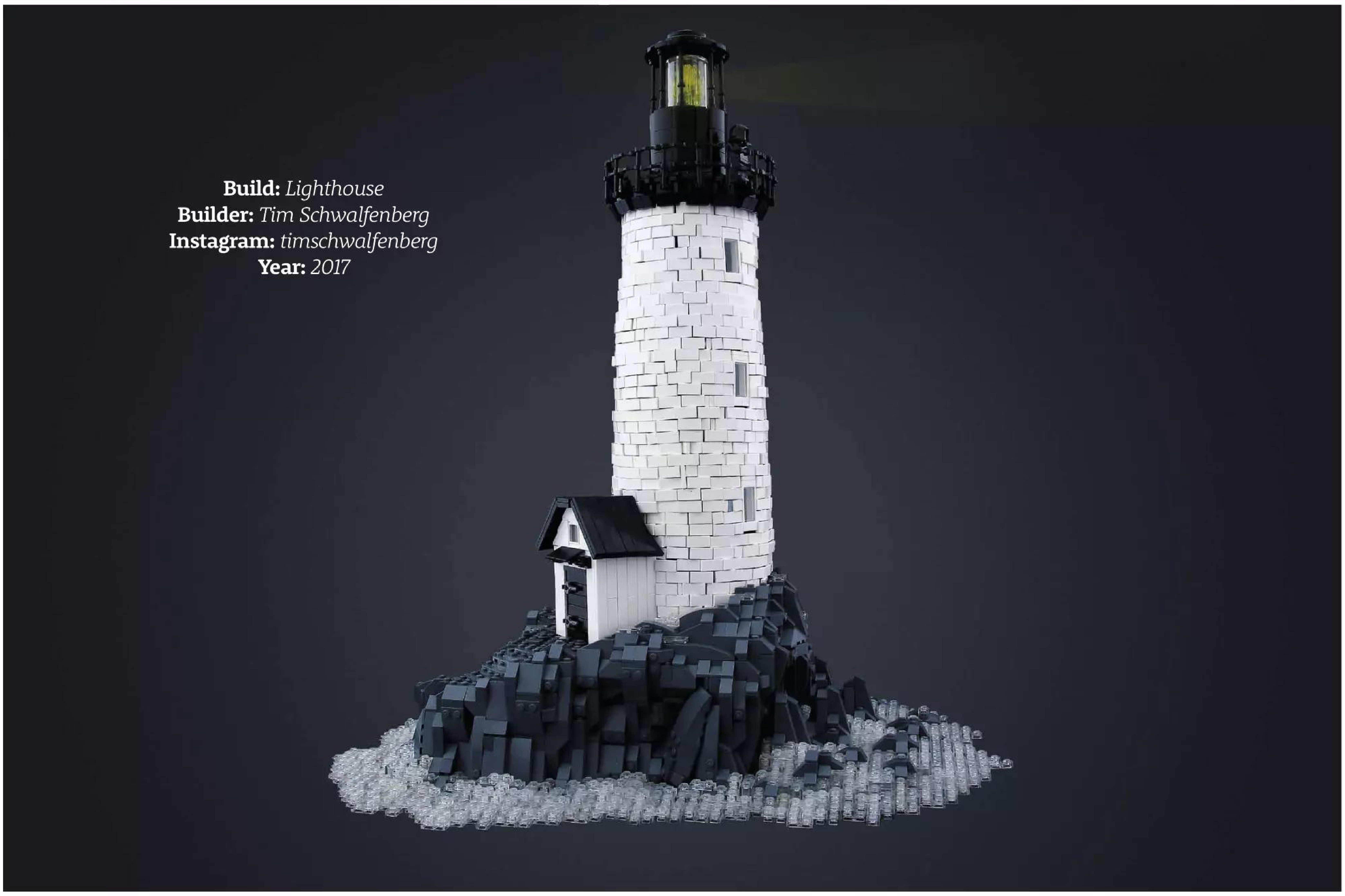
Build: *The Crow's Nest*
Builder: *Markus Rollbühler*
Instagram: *moriartus*
Year: *2025*



Build: *The Great Lighthouse of Barqa*
Builder: *Jonas Wide*
Instagram: *widelego*
Year: *2023*



Build: *New Wave*
Builder: *Ralf Langer*
Instagram: *ranghaal*
Year: *2018*



Build: *Lighthouse*
Builder: *Tim Schwalfenberg*
Instagram: *timschwalfenberg*
Year: *2017*

ROGUE RONIN

Explore Japan's Edo period with its castles, ships and villages through this magnificent collaboration by RogueBricks

Every year, the RogueBricks community shows up at Bricking Bavaria in Fürth with a new collaborative model. In 2024 their legendary ambition took them to traditional Japan. 170 baseplates and 34 contributors later, their display reached 2.5 x 4.3 meters, impossible to overlook with its bright autumn foliage, aspiring pagodas and the crown jewel of a castle, all based on Kumamoto Town.

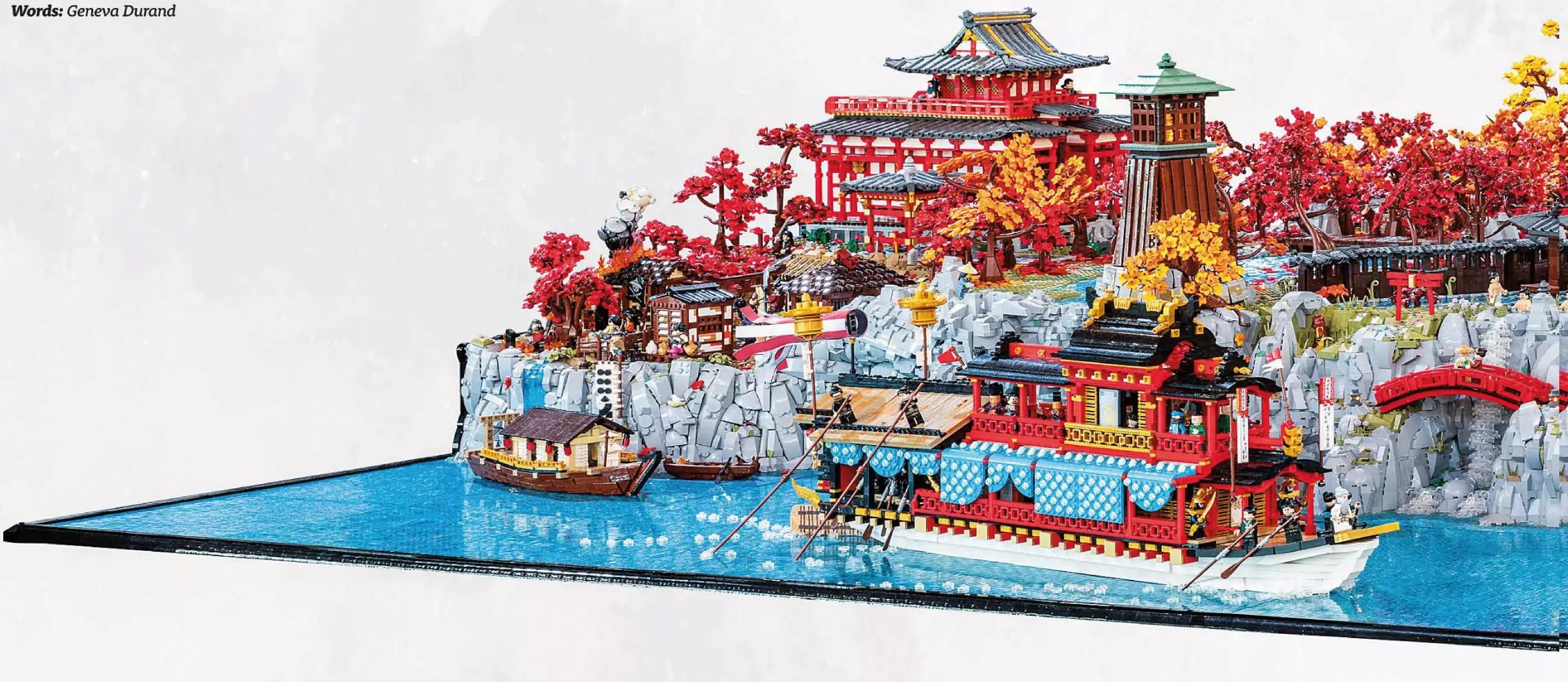
The meticulous planning that goes into each RogueBricks collaboration shines in Rogue Ronin with its intricate landscape featuring multi-level elevations and meticulously crafted rockwork. It's hard to exaggerate the challenge that comes with lining up rockwork built by multiple contributors, but the connections here are seamless. Predetermined stylistic elements like dark grey roofs and red bridges show up at multiple points in the collaboration, keeping it cohesive.

Yet another highlight are the fun functional scenes, like the moving dragon at a Matsuri festival in the village, a girl skipping stones on the lake near the lighthouse and samurais engaging in sword training in a dojo courtyard. Just as captivating are the well placed lights, showing off the detailed castle interior complete with blacksmith workshop and traditional tea ceremonies.

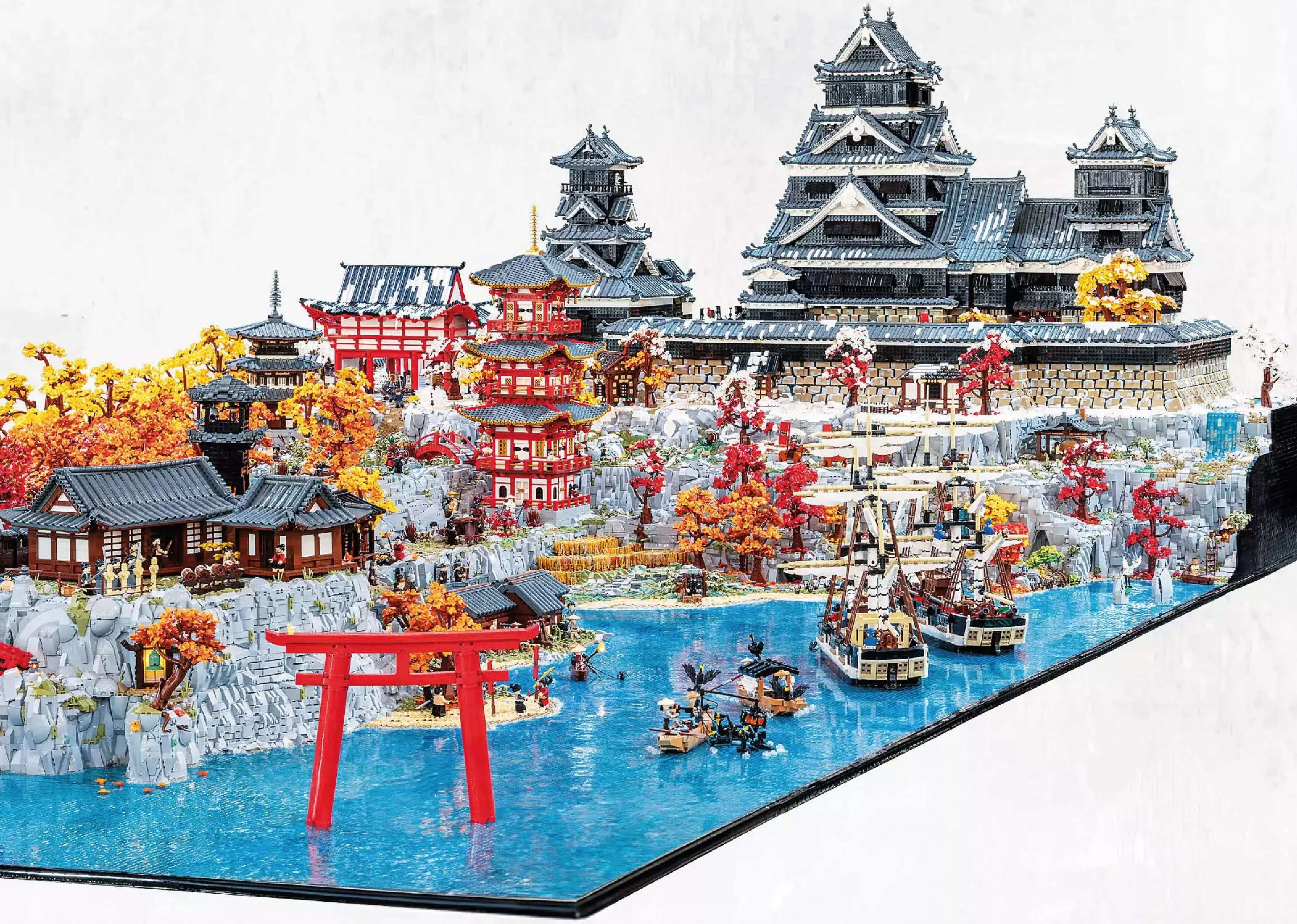
RogueBricks went all out for convention attendees with information plaques describing historical events, locations and myths depicted in the model, including scenes with the famous samurai Miyamoto Musashi — from his legendary duels and sword-fighting teachings to his later years of exile as a monk. For those less historically inclined, there are ten NINJAGO characters to find.

In previous years, RogueBricks' collaborative displays at Bricking Bavaria have featured themes like Pirates, Diesel Punk, Adventurers, the Canadian Frontier and Ancient Greece, each one massive and meticulously detailed, bringing home time and again the show's Best Collaborative Model award. With Rogue Ronin they lived up to their tradition and once again defended their well-deserved title.

Words: *Geneva Durand*



Builders: *RogueBricks (Andrea Rollbühler, Cecilie Fritzvold, Christian Rau, Daniel Bodky, David Dressler, Elias Hübner, Eugen Sellin, Fernando Pontes, Filippos Tsialidis, Gerrit Gottschalk, Gino Lohse, Hannes Katzmann, Hannes Tscharner, Johannes Haimann, Jonas Kramm, Justus Morgenthal, Kevin Walter, Lasse Deleuran, Luca Schlücking, Marcel Arlt, Marcel Veit, Marion Weintraut, Mark van der Maarel, Markus Rollbühler, Markus Ronge, Michael, Michael Diermann, Pascal Zimmermann, Patric Gnepf, Robert Radlmaier, Thomas Weigelt, Tobias Keim, Valentin Köberlein)*
Instagram: *roguebricks_lug*
Year: *2024*



Blocks: Who built Rogue Ronin?

Hannes: Andrea Rollbühler supported us with landscape and lush fall trees. Cecilie Fritzvold amazed with a dojo, complete with students moving back and forth utilising a motor and smart mechanism. Christian Rau created an imposing cliffside, complete with a cave and a pottery.

Without Daniel Bodky's houses and rising landscape, the village would hardly merit its name. David Dressler joined us with a traditional boat—a yakatabune—as well as a seaside duel. Elias Hübner contributed highly detailed houses outside the castle wall.

Eugen Sellin created a cosy landscape featuring a tranquil pavilion. Fernando Pontes created a massive forest right in the centre of it all and also contributed to the seaside village with shops and houses. Filippos Tsialidis went fishing—with cormorants.

Gerrit Gottschalk created an idyllic village nestled into the cliffs, undergoing a bandit raid. Gino Lohse built a dyeworks surrounded by beautiful rockwork and waterfalls. Hannes Katzmann contributed a beautiful pagoda nestled into an idyllic forest.

Johannes Haimann built an imposing temple surrounded by lush trees, complete with a beautiful interior. Jonas Kramm brought an idyllic cliffside, complete with a shrine and a bridge for lovers, overlooking the sea. Justus Morgenthal contributed an imposing tower to the castle, collaborating with Hannes in the process.

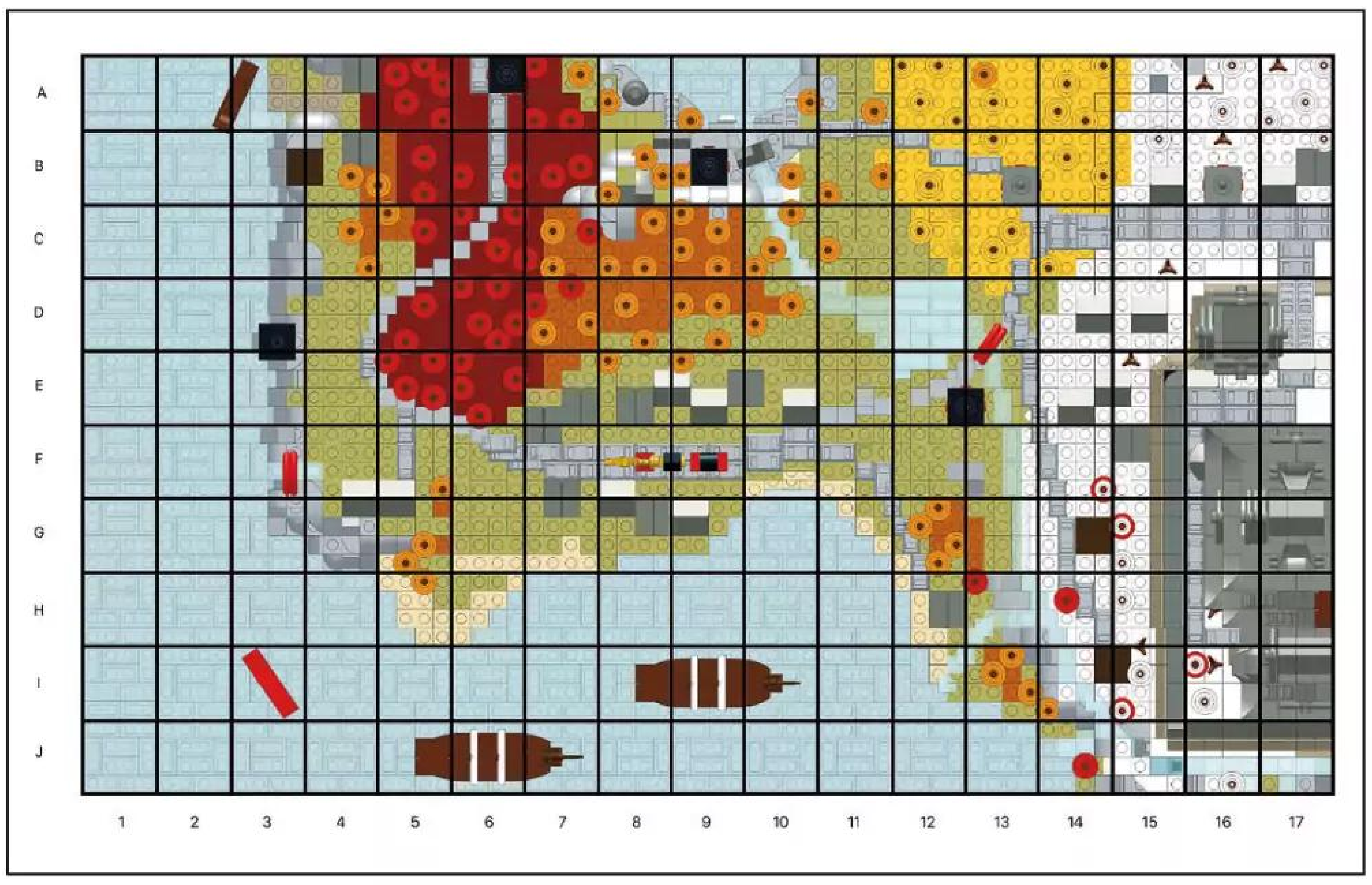
Kevin Walter not only came to the rescue and created a military training area at the last minute, he also brought his pinnaces into the waters of Japan. Lasse Deleuran did his usual magic and had programmed a little minifigure skipping stones across a vast lake next to his light house atop the cliffs. Luca Schlücking tied together our sea front, complete with some bandits and contraband.

Marcel Arlt built a large stretch of land along the side of the layout, going from a snowy monkey-riddled well to the lush and swampy forest. Marcel Veit created a parade for the seaside village, including a motorised dragon dance. Marion Weintraut was responsible for the big torii gate in the sea.

Mark van der Maarel created parts of the castle outskirts outside the castle walls. Markus Rollbühler brought some rice fields, right underneath Michael's imposing pagoda. Markus Ronge sent in a colourful and imposing barge—a goza bune. Michael contributed an imposing pagoda, overlooking a lake and a tranquil bridge.

Michael Diermann and Sascha Brüning collaborated on monkey-housing hot springs and a river that framed the castle on the right side of the layout. Pascal Zimmermann contributed with an idyllic forest, overlooking the training grounds. Patric Gnepf sent some bandits with his modules, hiding out in the lush forest.

Robert Radlmaier contributed a watchtower and a bathing house to our seaside village. Thomas Weigelt created parts of the castle outskirts outside the castle walls. Tobias Keim created a large temple complex, with multiple buildings, statues and courtyard. Valentin Köberlein contributed a large swamp with imposing trees and precarious footbridges.



Then I spent a whole year building the giant Kumamoto Castle that was the imposing eye-catcher overlooking the whole layout.

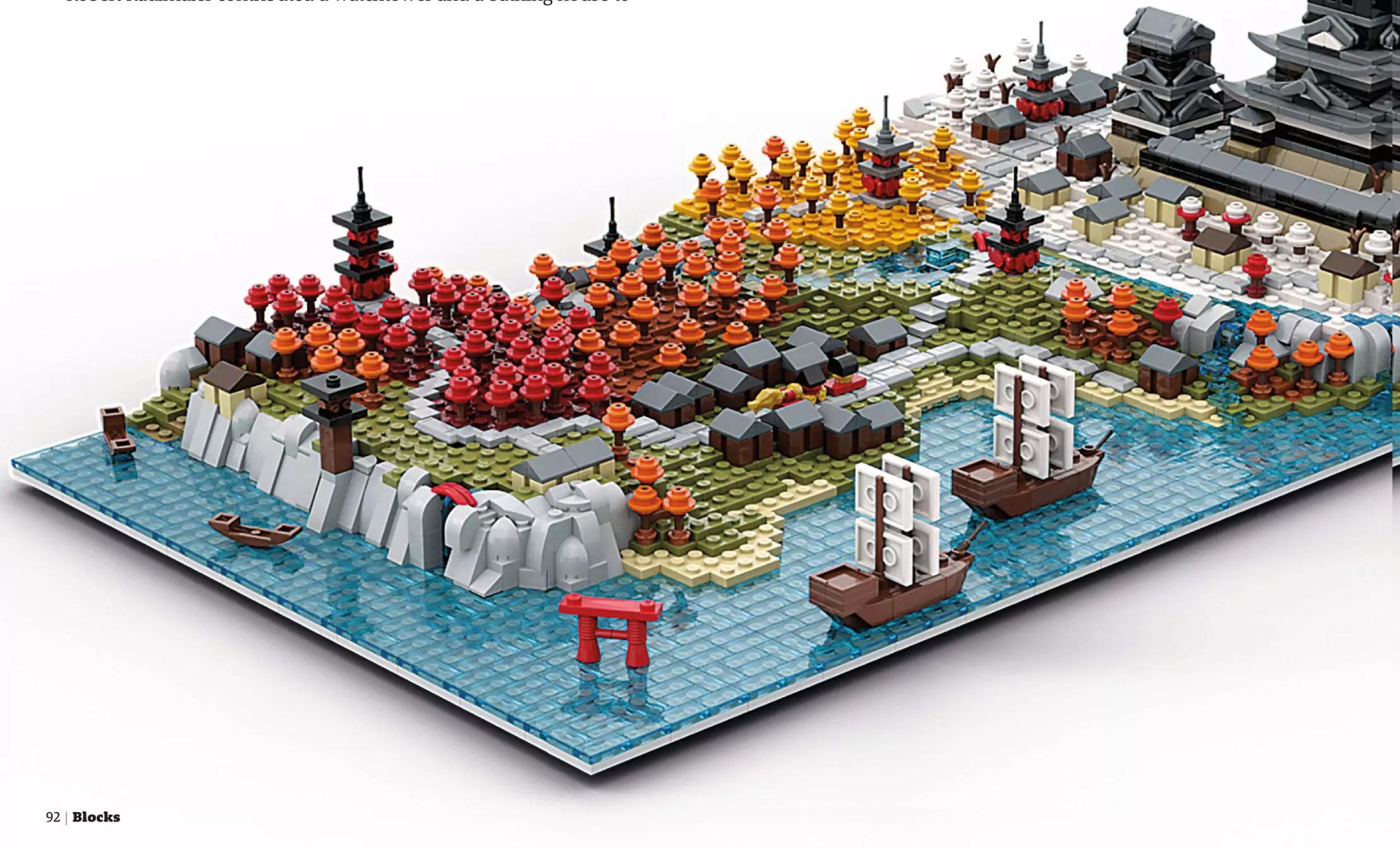
What was the inspiration behind Rogue Ronin?

The golden age of the Samurai in 17th century Japan. It was a time of peace, when art and culture flourished, and many of the most fascinating legends were born. It was also the last great era of the Samurai before modernisation. We felt the vibrant colours of autumn made the perfect backdrop to capture that atmosphere.

What was the planning process for Rogue Ronin like?

Since our team is international, we organise everything online. It usually starts about a year before the exhibition – we brainstorm themes, pitch ideas and decide which concept excites us most. Very early on, we discuss the landscape and topography we want to represent. Once we have a vision, we create an illustration of the idea and gather historical references, cultural details and mood boards with architecture, landscapes and characters.

Then, the whole collab team chooses what they want to contribute in



terms of content and scale. From there, we build a detailed plan in 1:8 scale, dividing everything into 32x32 baseplate modules arranged on a digital map.

We also define building standards for architecture, landscapes and minifigures. Since up to 36 builders are involved, these guidelines are crucial to keep the style consistent—from the height of buildings to the techniques for rockwork. That way, when it all comes together, it feels like a single, unified world.

What were the most challenging parts of this collaboration?

For us, the toughest stage was right at the beginning: deciding how large the build should be, figuring out how to distribute the modules, and making sure every piece would eventually come together as one seamless scene. With such a complex landscape full of hills, cliffs and rocky terrain, it required constant coordination and dialogue between the builders, adjusting details along the way so that when the modules finally met, the landscape flowed naturally — as if it had been built by a single pair of hands.

What was it like to see Rogue Ronin come together at Bricking Bavaria?

It's always a huge relief to finally see everything assembled for the first time in person and realise how it all fits together as one scene. This year, the autumn trees were especially exciting to see in their full glory.

Were there any special public reactions?

Once again, we were incredibly honoured to win both first place from the public and first place from the exhibitors in the collab category. But what touched me most was the feedback from a visitor studying Japanology. She thanked us for presenting the theme with such depth and detail — it really showed us that our work had an impact.

Has Rogue Ronin already been dismantled?

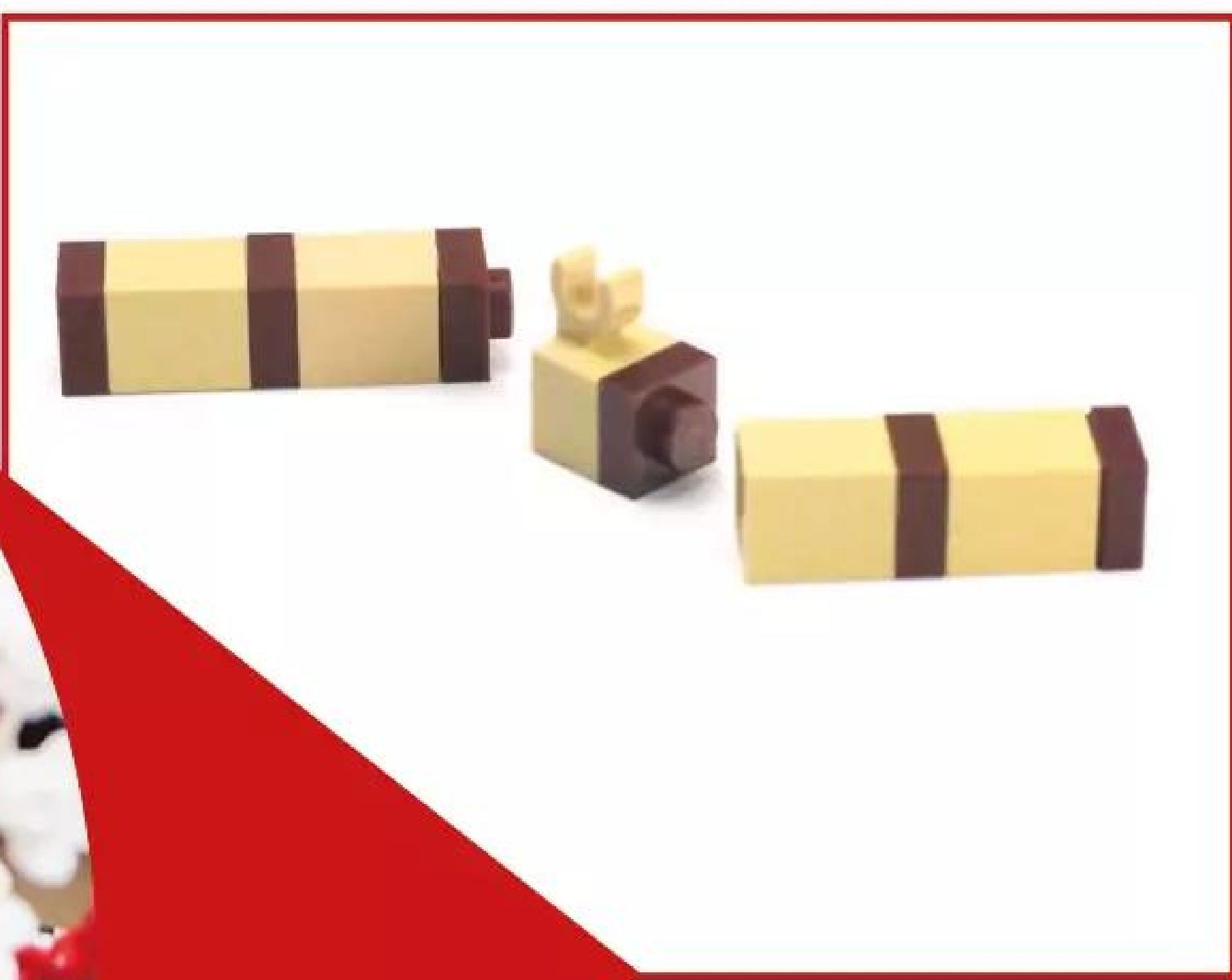
Yes, each module belongs to private collections, so everyone took their sections home at the end of the event. Most of the bricks will find their way into the next collaboration!

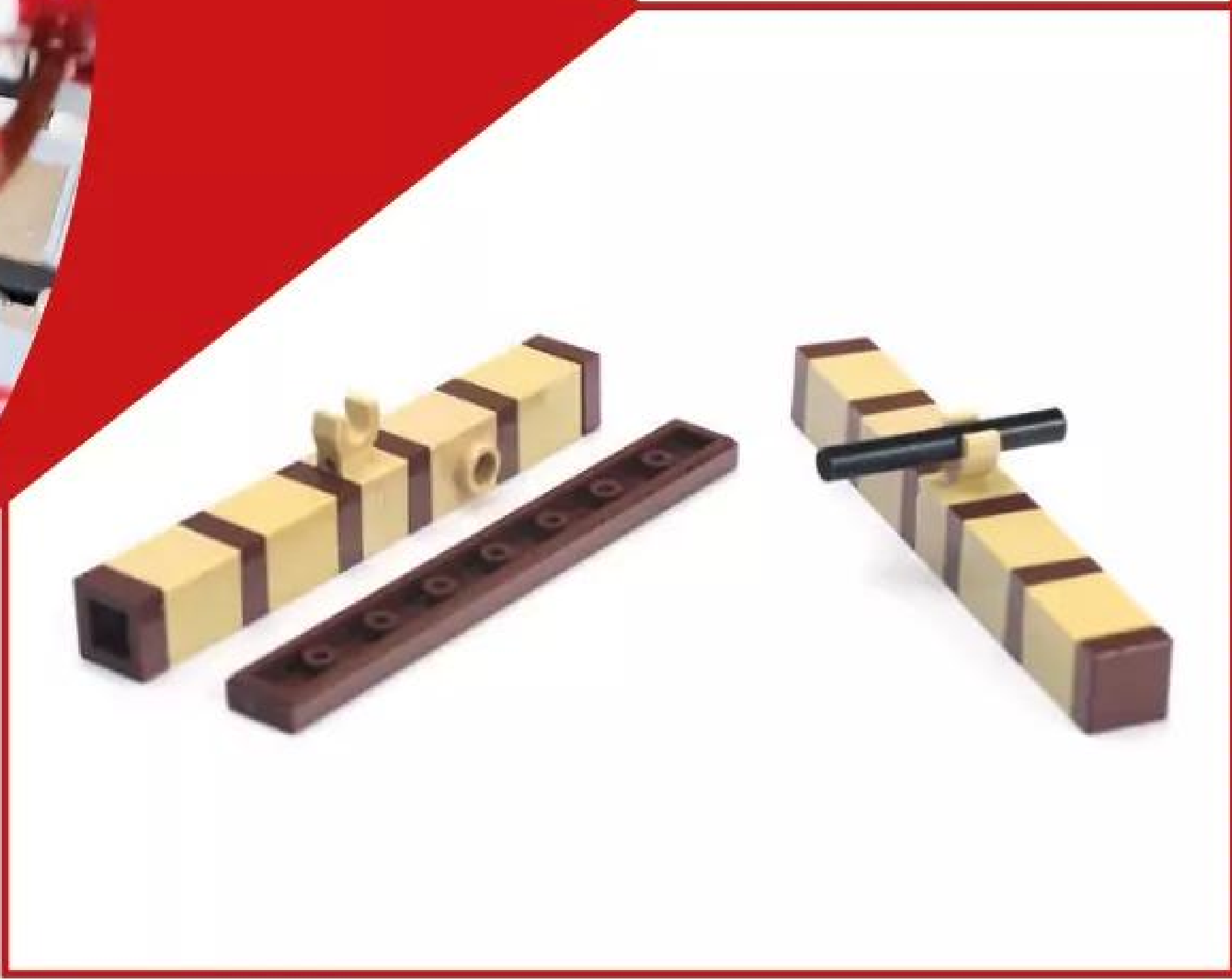
What's next for RogueBricks?

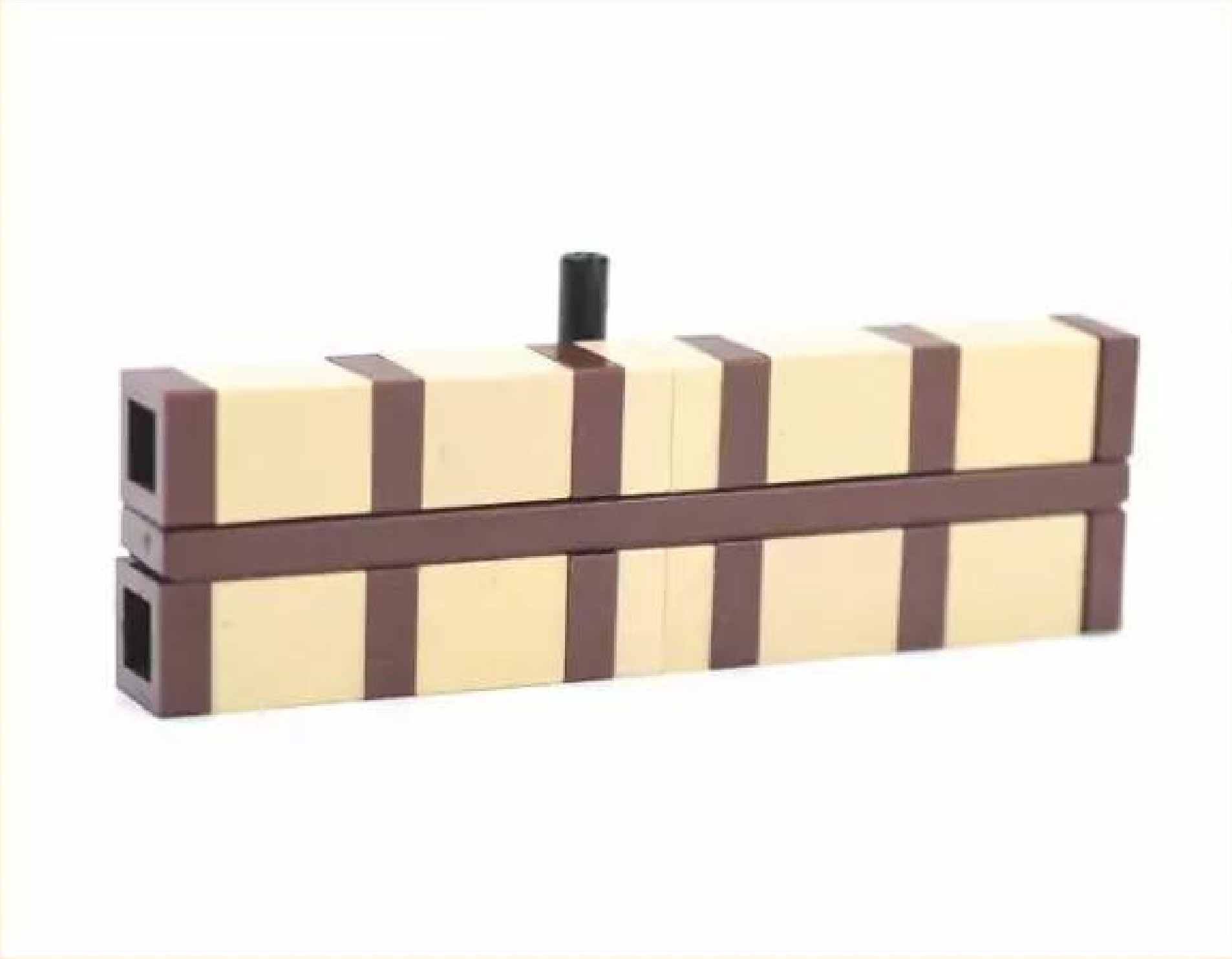
Every year we plan new collaborations and Bricking Bavaria will once again be one of our biggest projects. In the past we've explored historical themes. This year, we're heading into completely new territory—but that's all we can reveal for now. We like to keep the next theme a surprise!

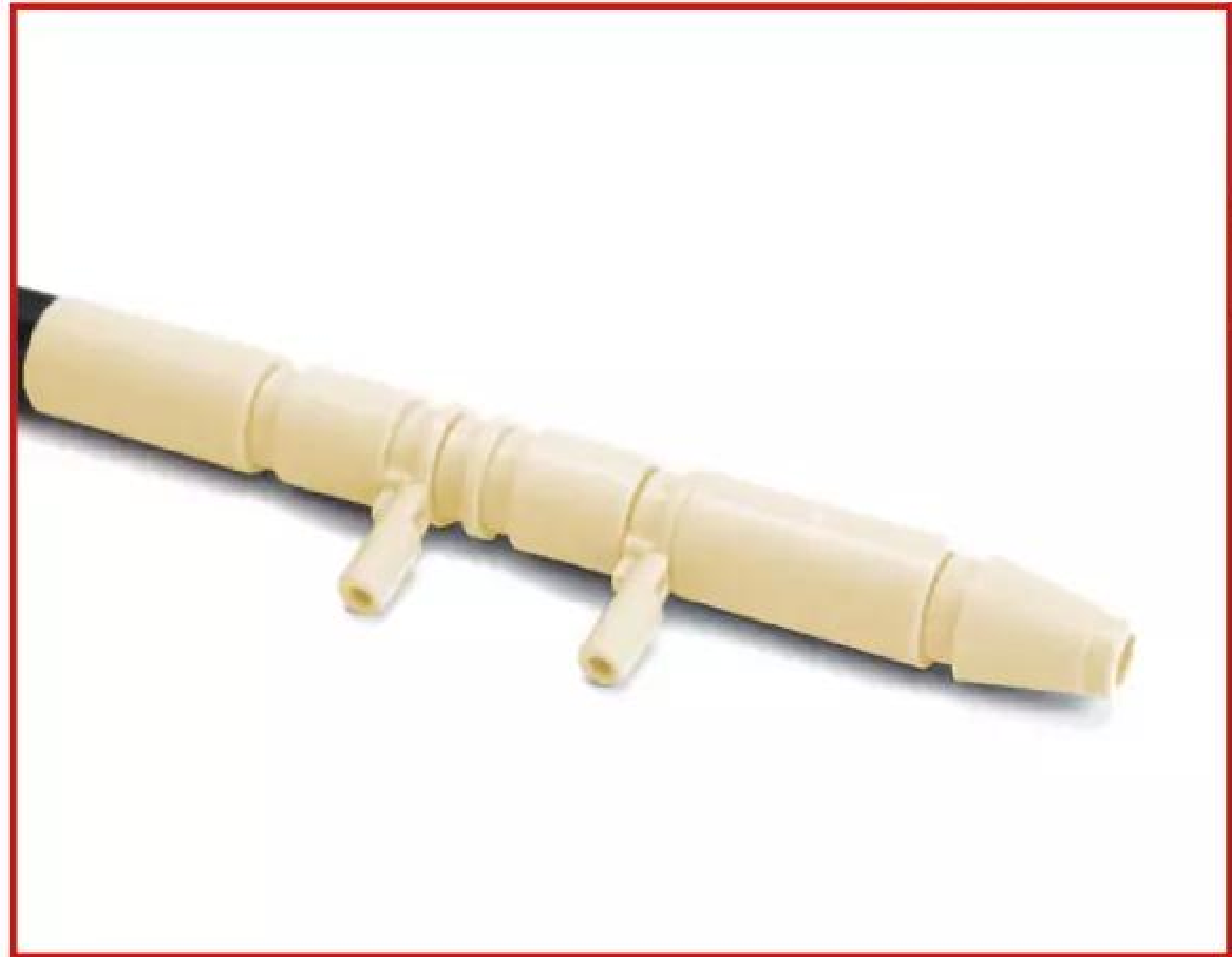
"It's always a huge relief to finally see everything assembled for the first time."

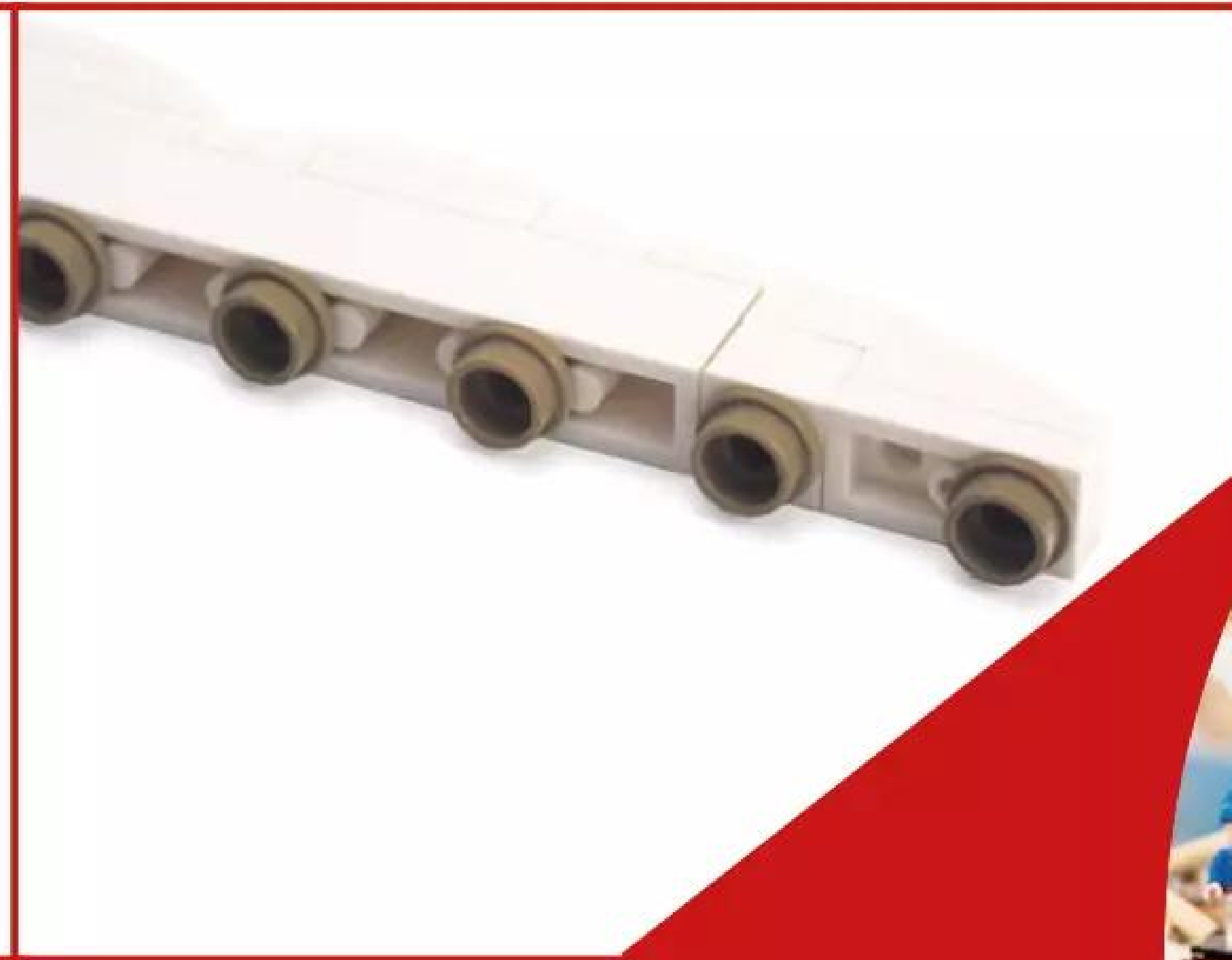
The traditional post and lintel structure of a Japanese house is mimicked here with sideways rows of 1x1 bricks and plates, with tiles in between. Behind the smooth wall surface, a pair of clips makes it easy to connect the rows for stability. The assembly is then sandwiched securely between the house's corner pillars.



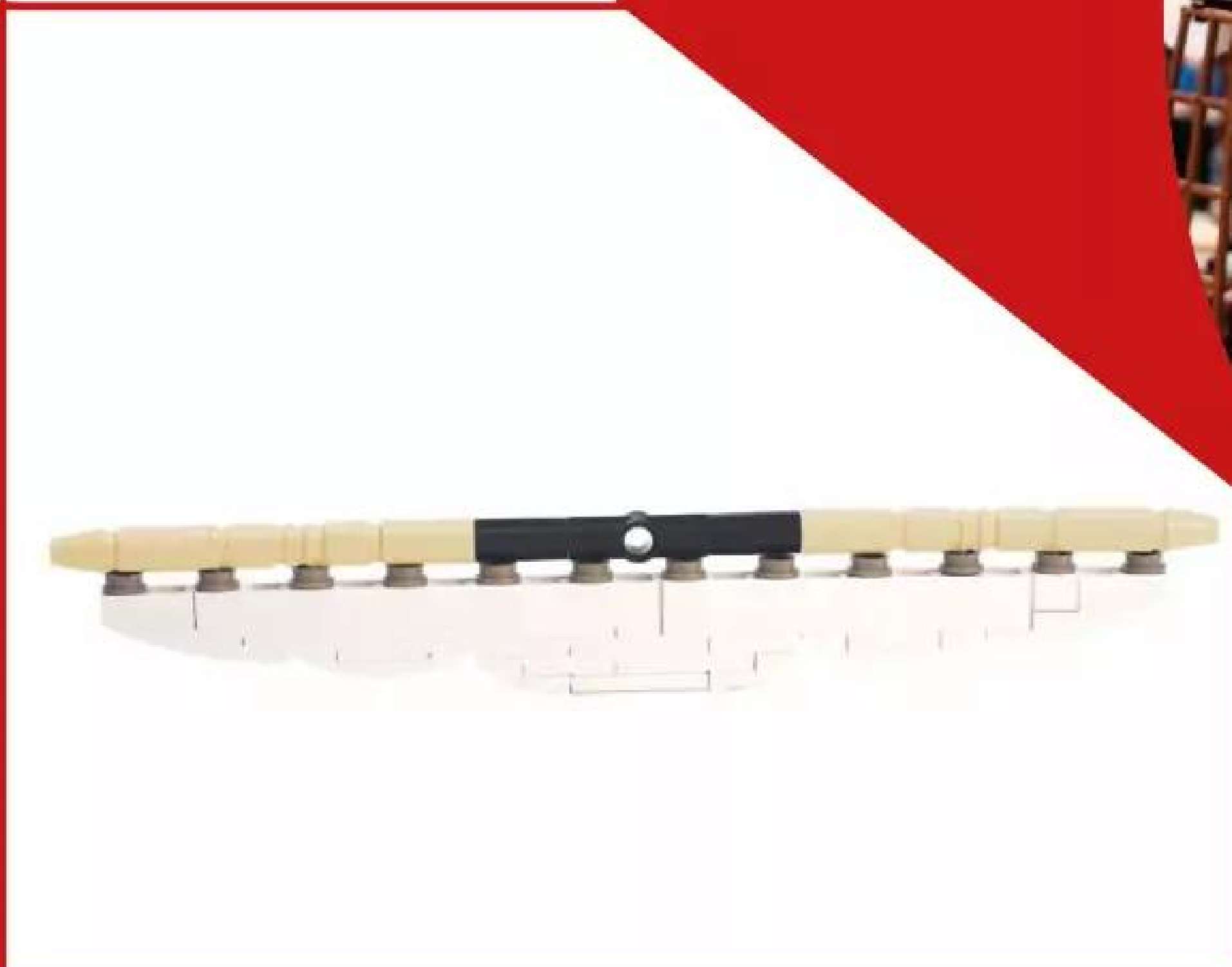




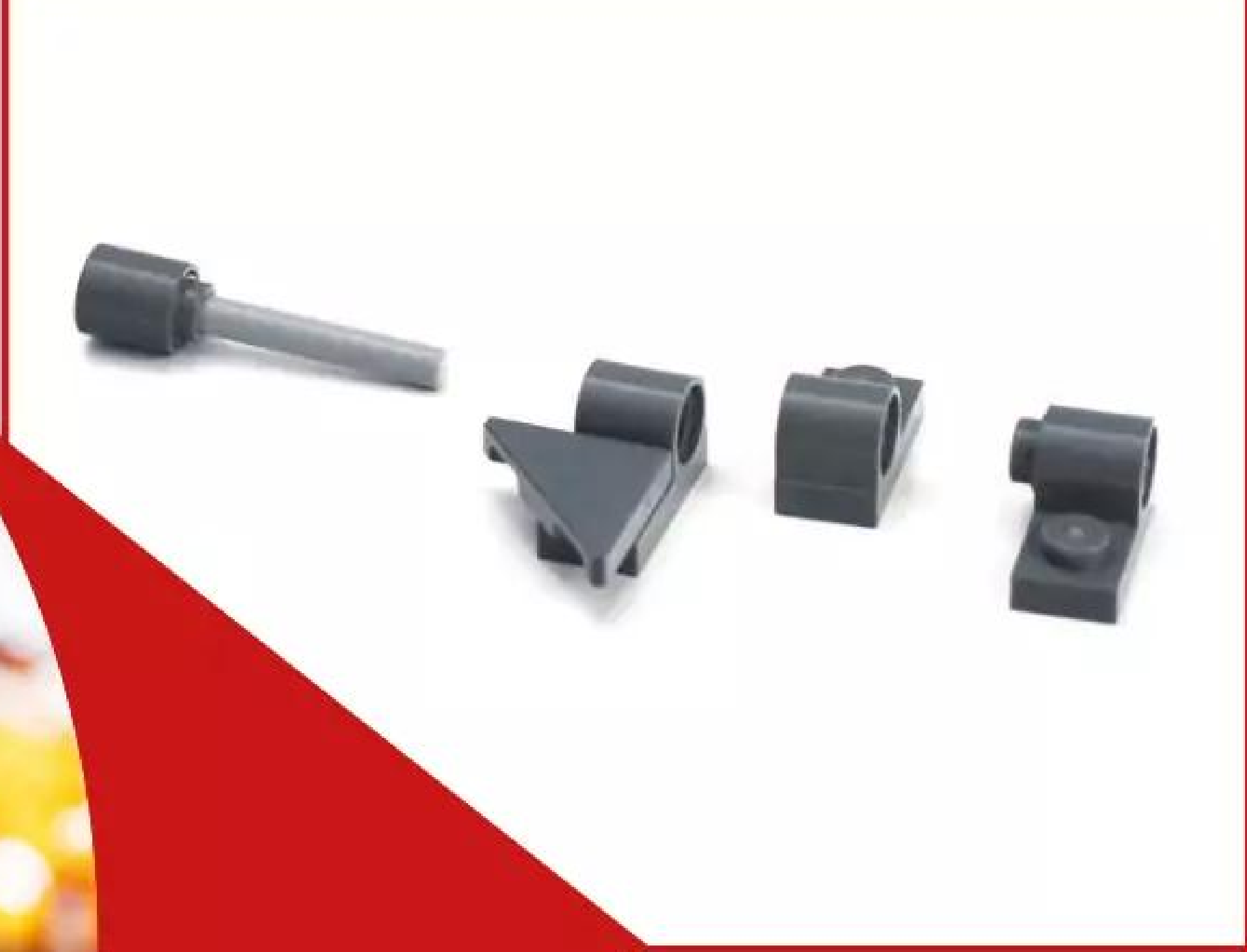


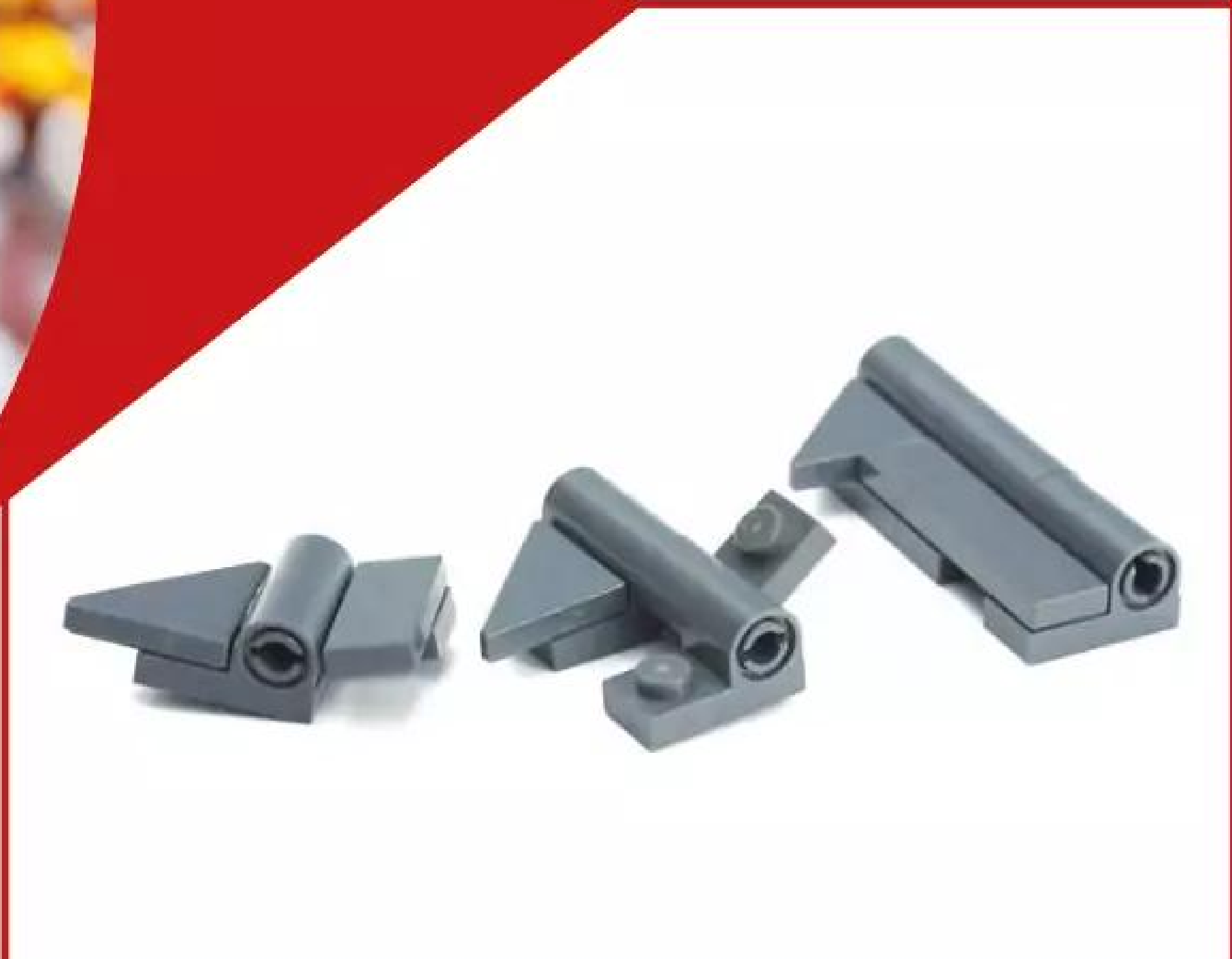


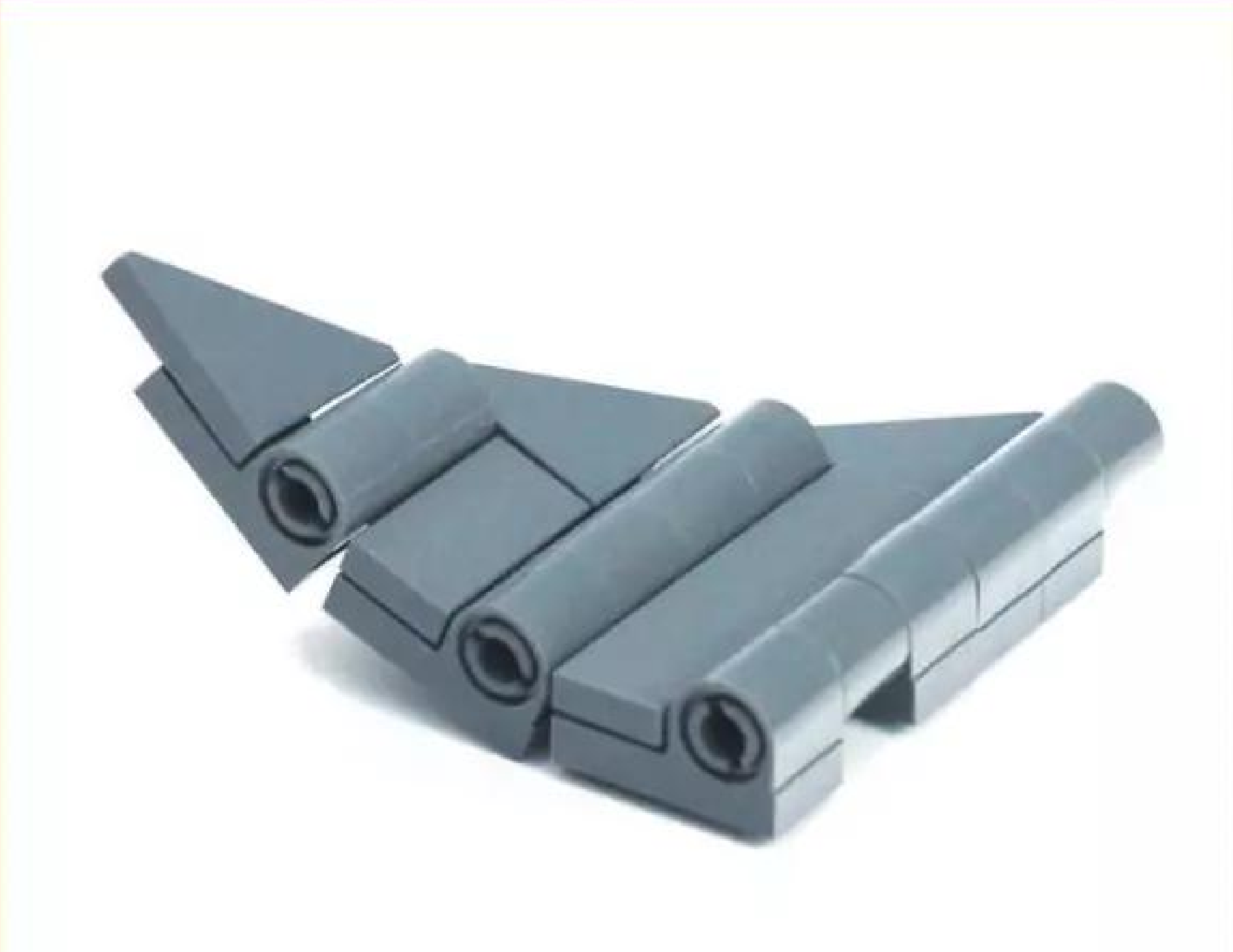
Furled sails are a good look for ships close to shore, and they also are convenient for builders who would rather click bricks together than fiddle with cloth and string. A few curved white slopes provide the bunched-up look and the bar-and-stud element offers a stable and smooth connection to the crossbeam.

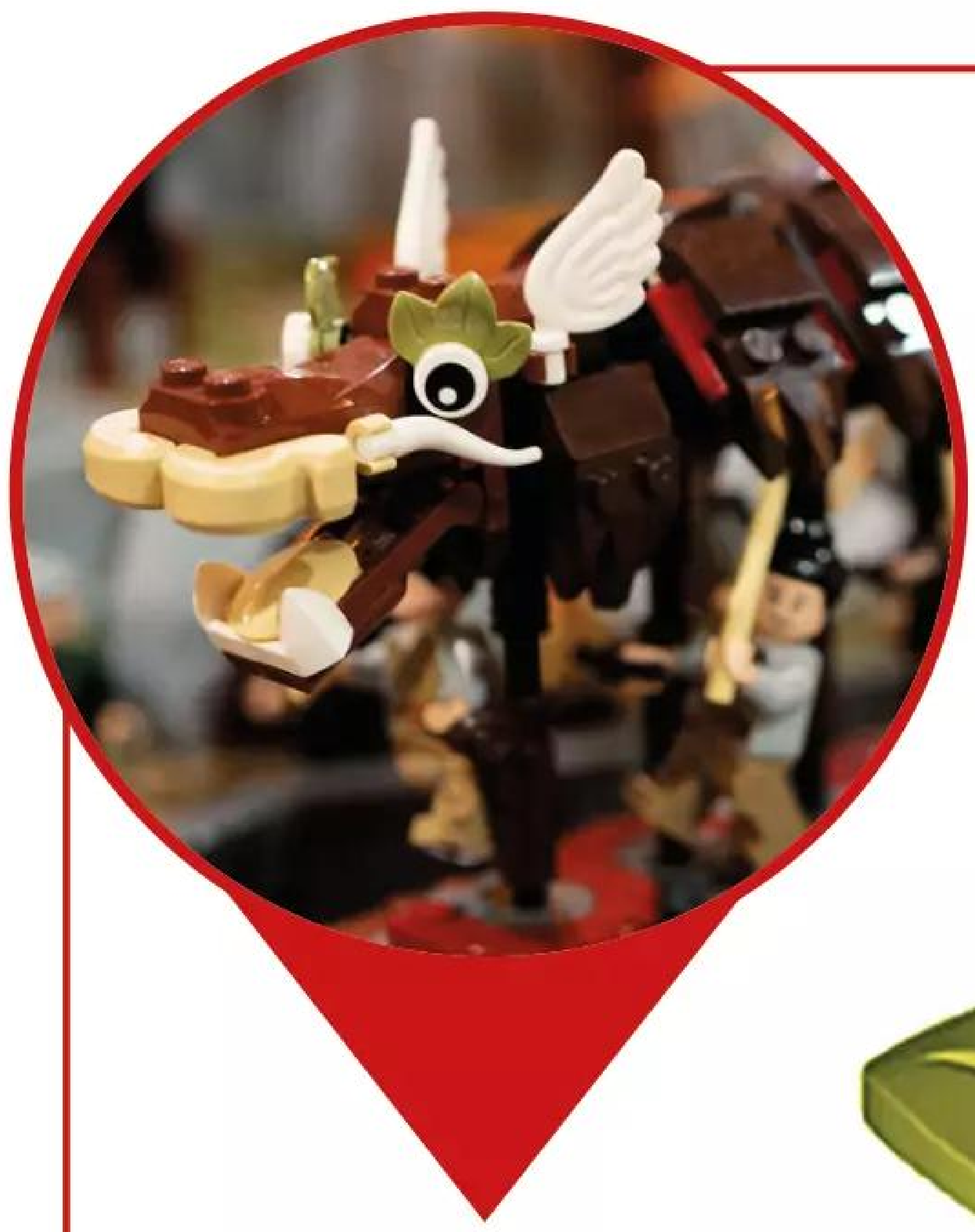


The iconic ceramic tiled roofs found on Japanese pagodas made their way into Rogue Ronin as well. The flared corners are the most challenging, off-grid on both axes. Here, a flexible but strong roof is achieved with technic plates and half pins, allowing the corners to bend as needed.

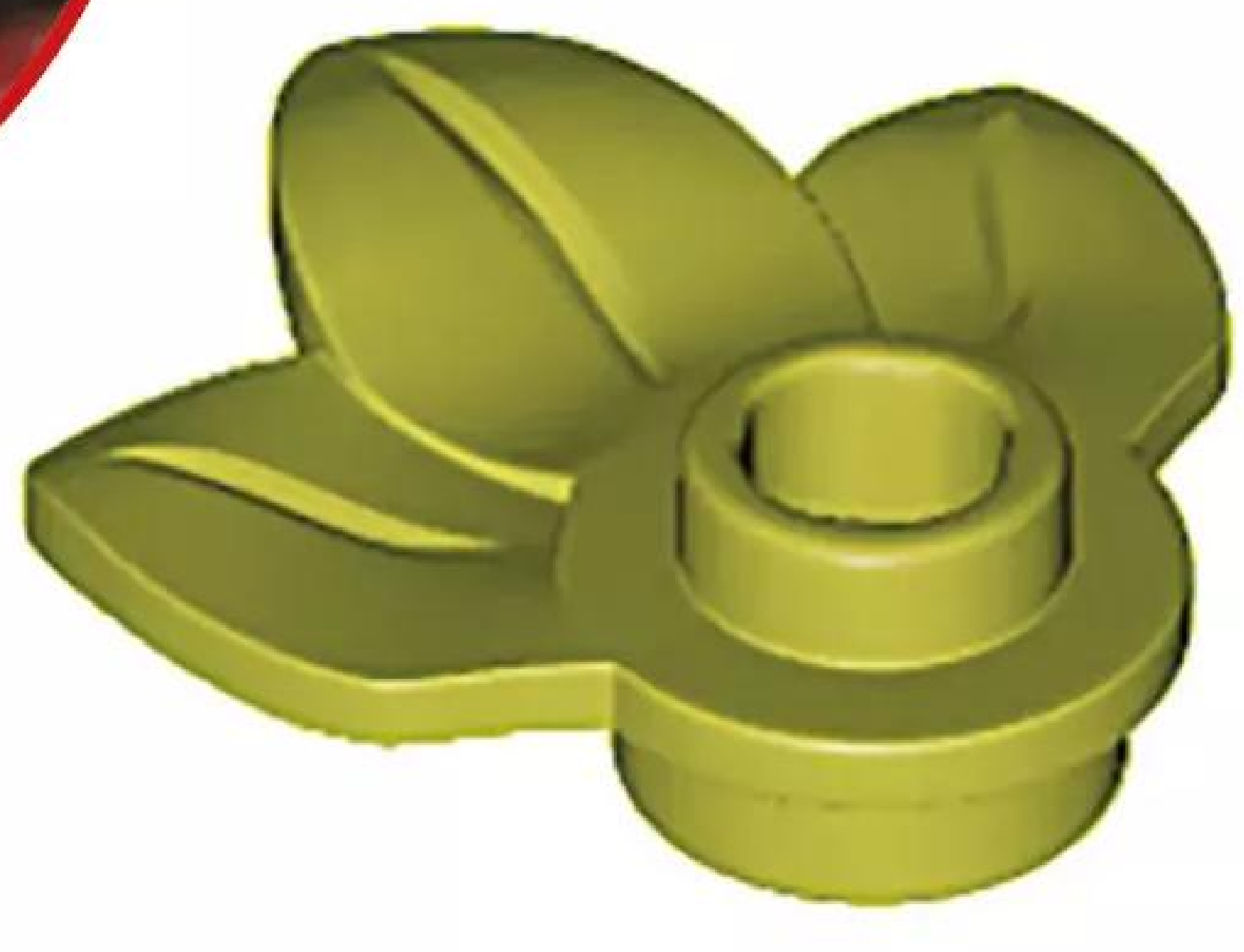




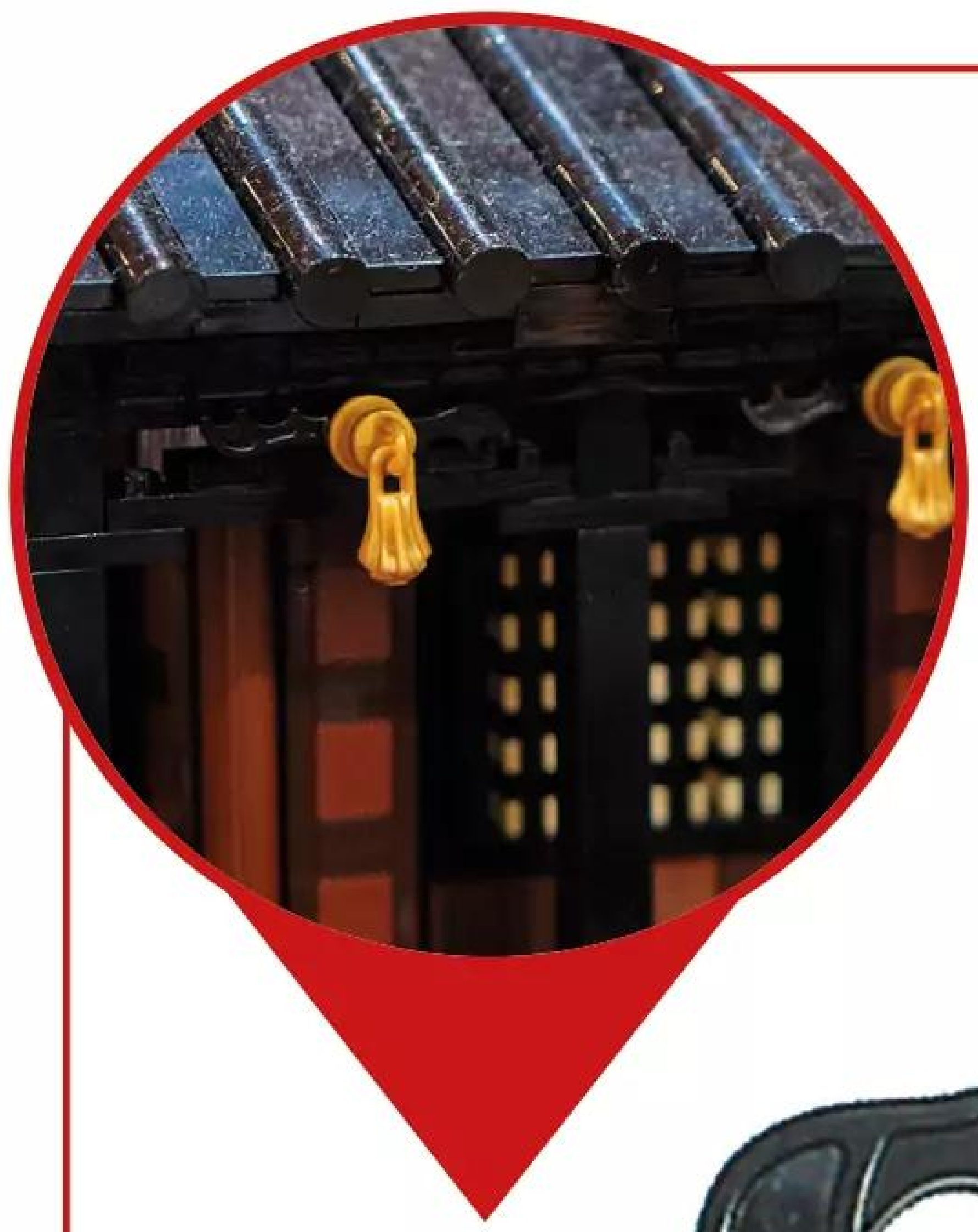




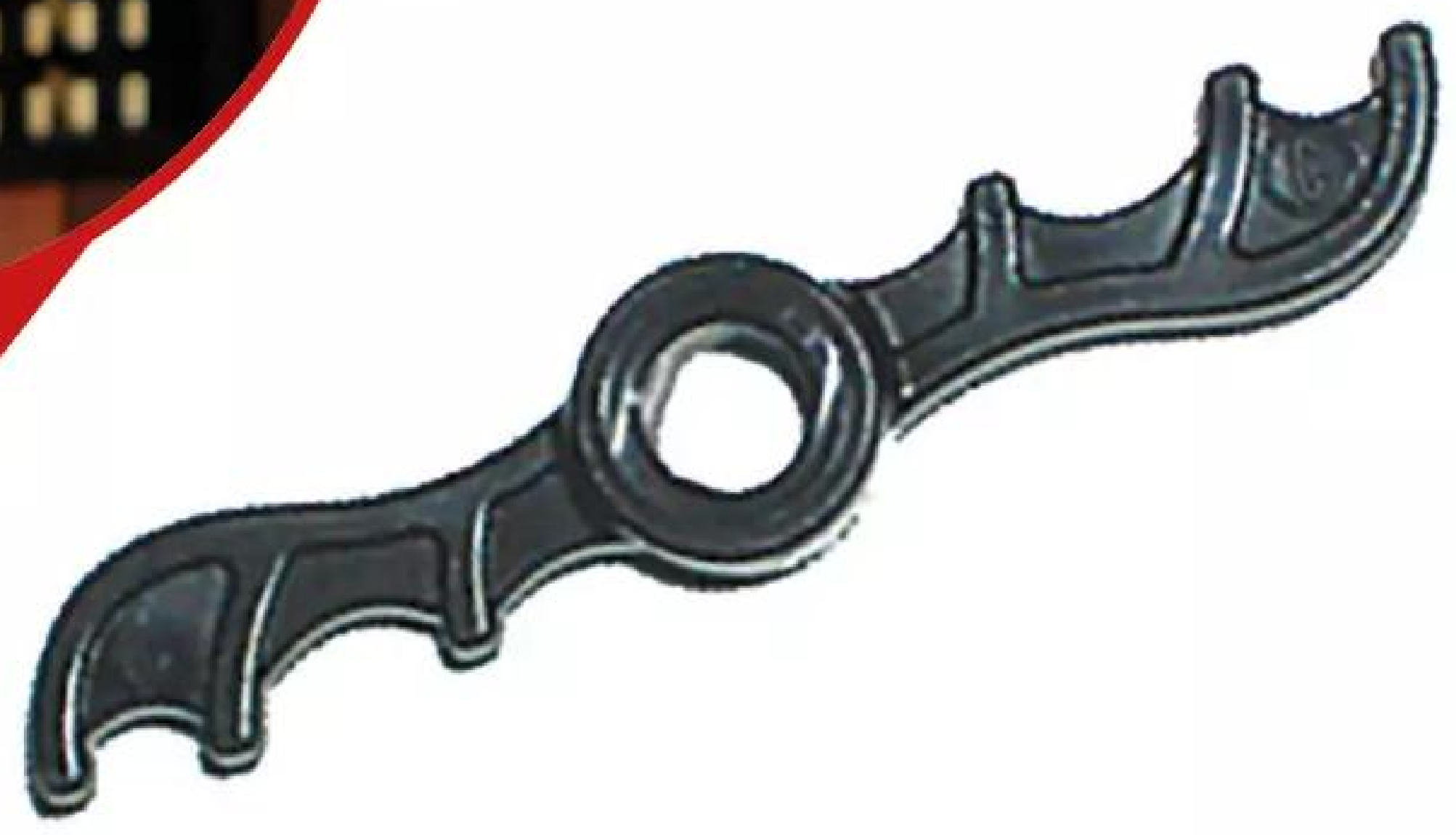
Part: *Triple Leaf*
Bricklink Name: *Plant Plate, Round 1 x 1 with 3 Layered Leaves*
ID: *32607*



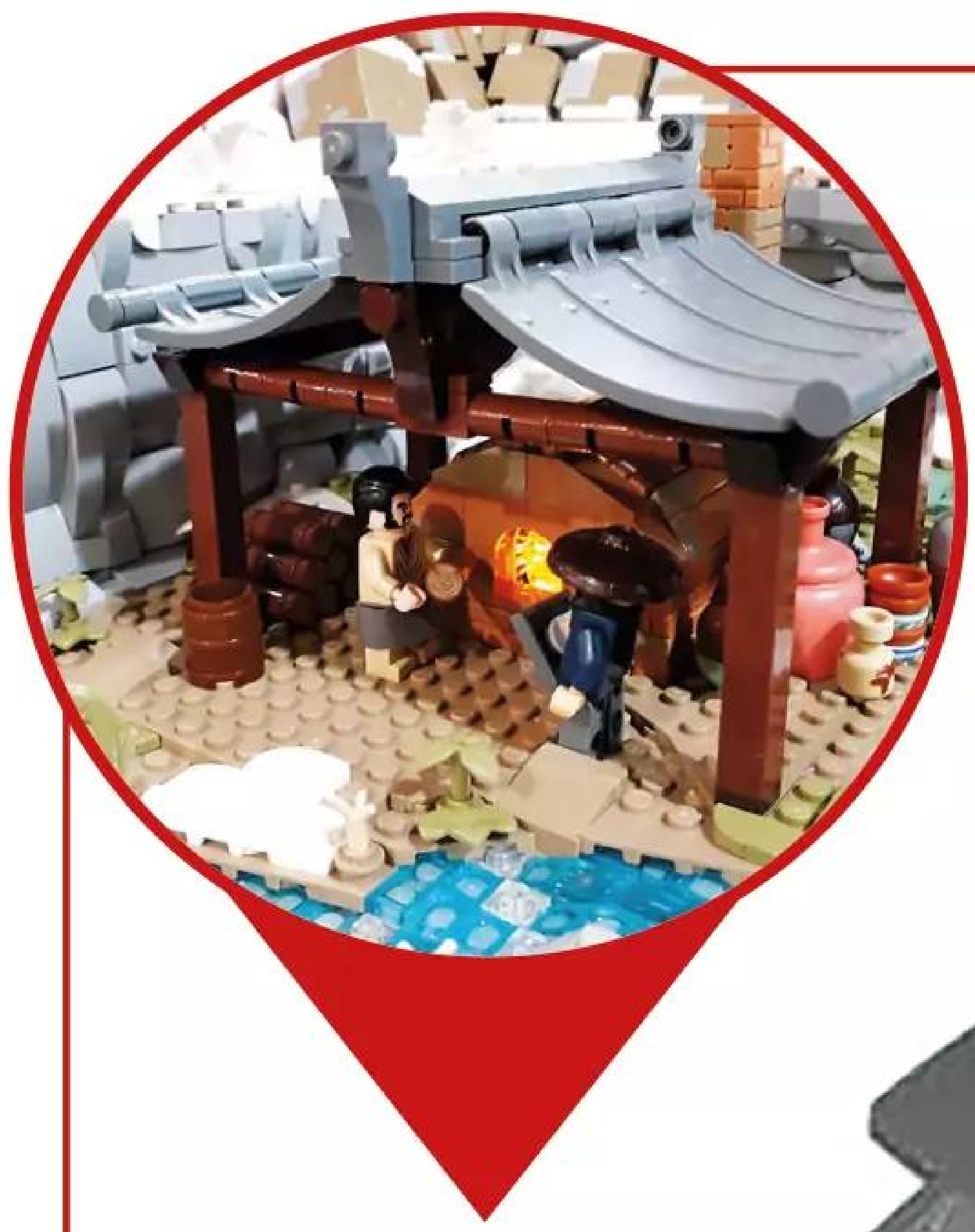
These broadly flared leaves give this dragon a wide-awake look and the olive colour calls attention to its eyes.



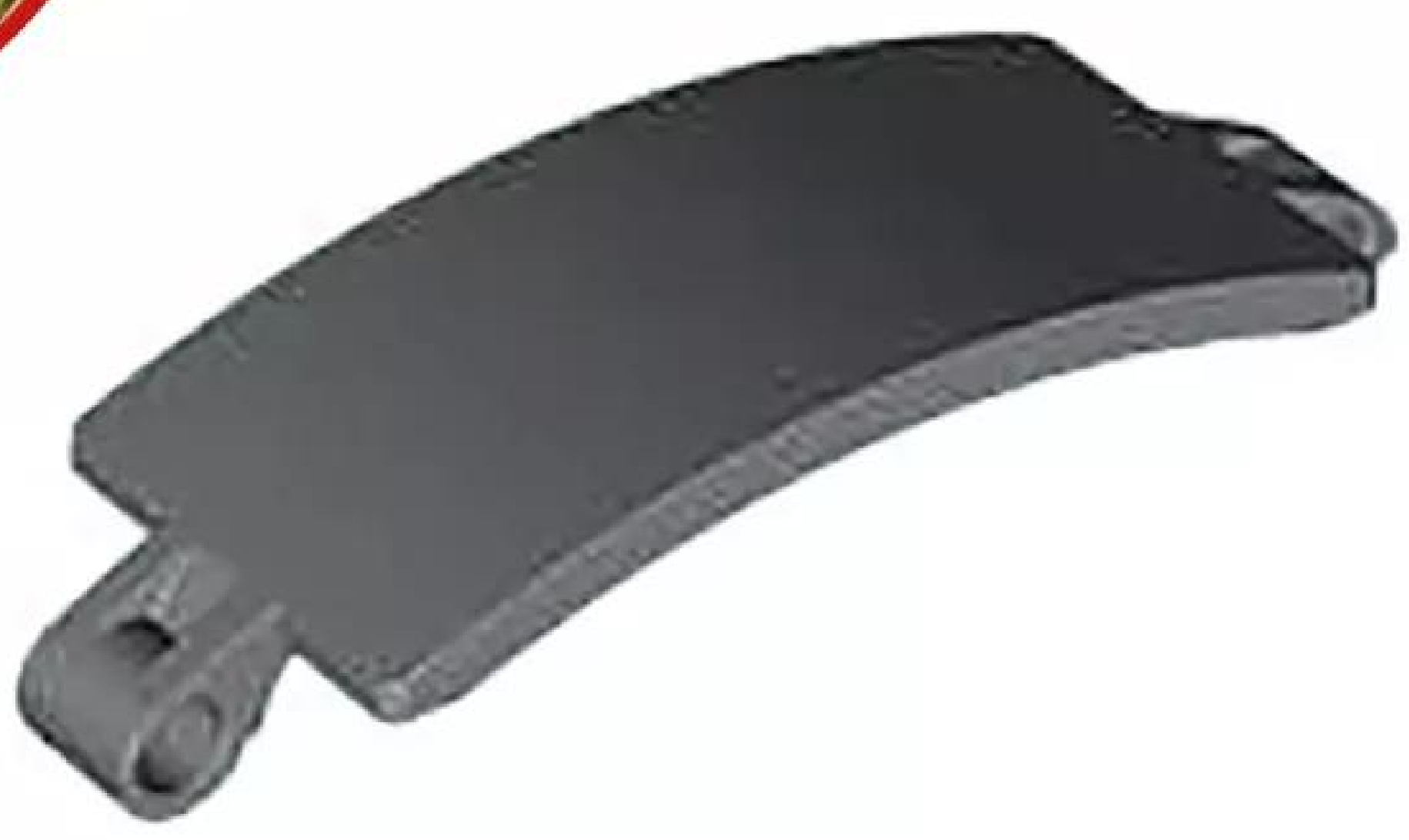
Part: *Batwing*
Bricklink Name: *Minifigure, Utensil Batman Batwing*
ID: *55707a*



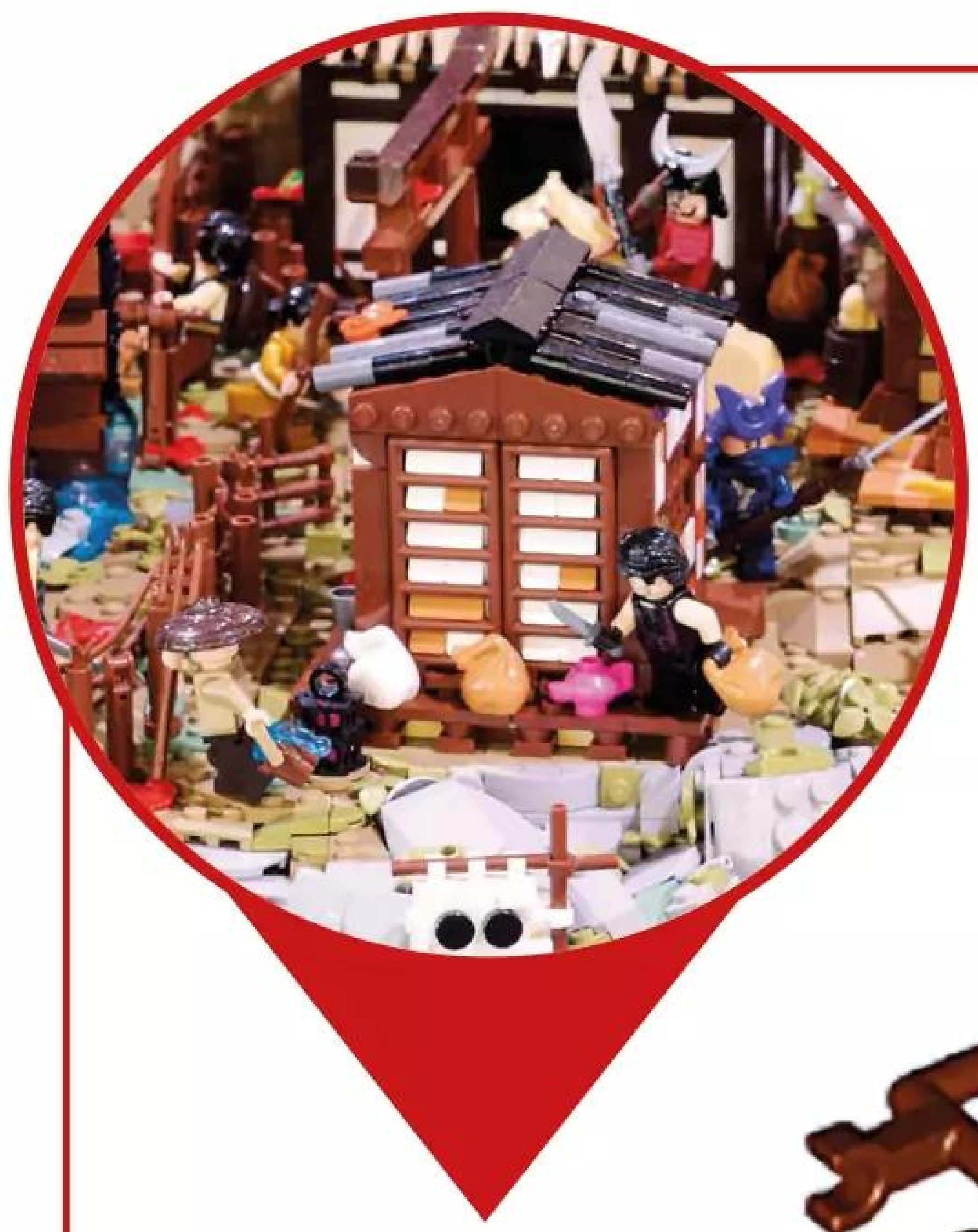
Batman's signature throwable weapon shows up in an unexpected spot — right under the eaves of this Japanese roof, where it adds the right hint of intricacy.



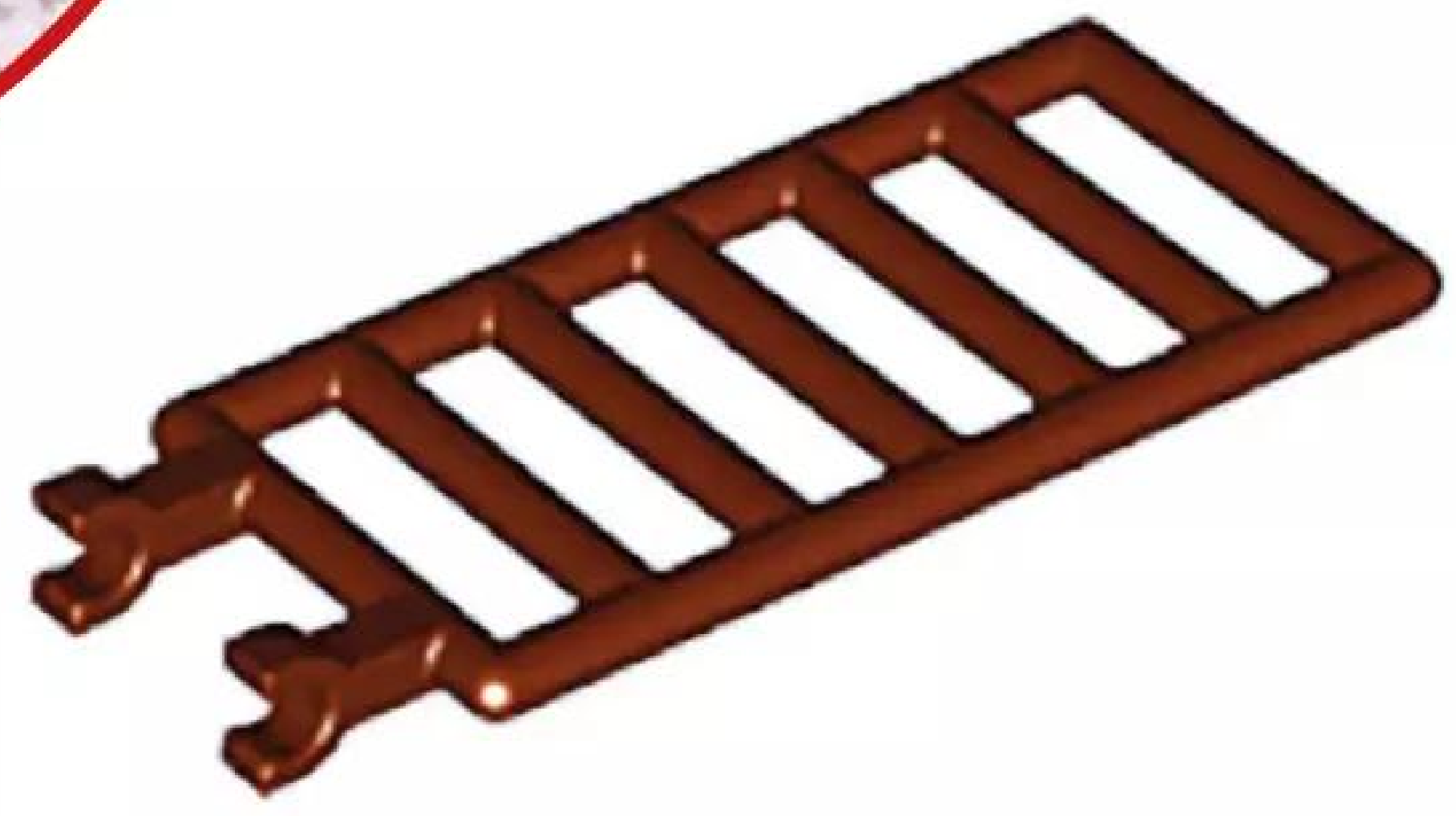
Part: *Curved Technic Panel*
Bricklink Name: *Technic, Panel Curved 3 x 9*
ID: *5427*



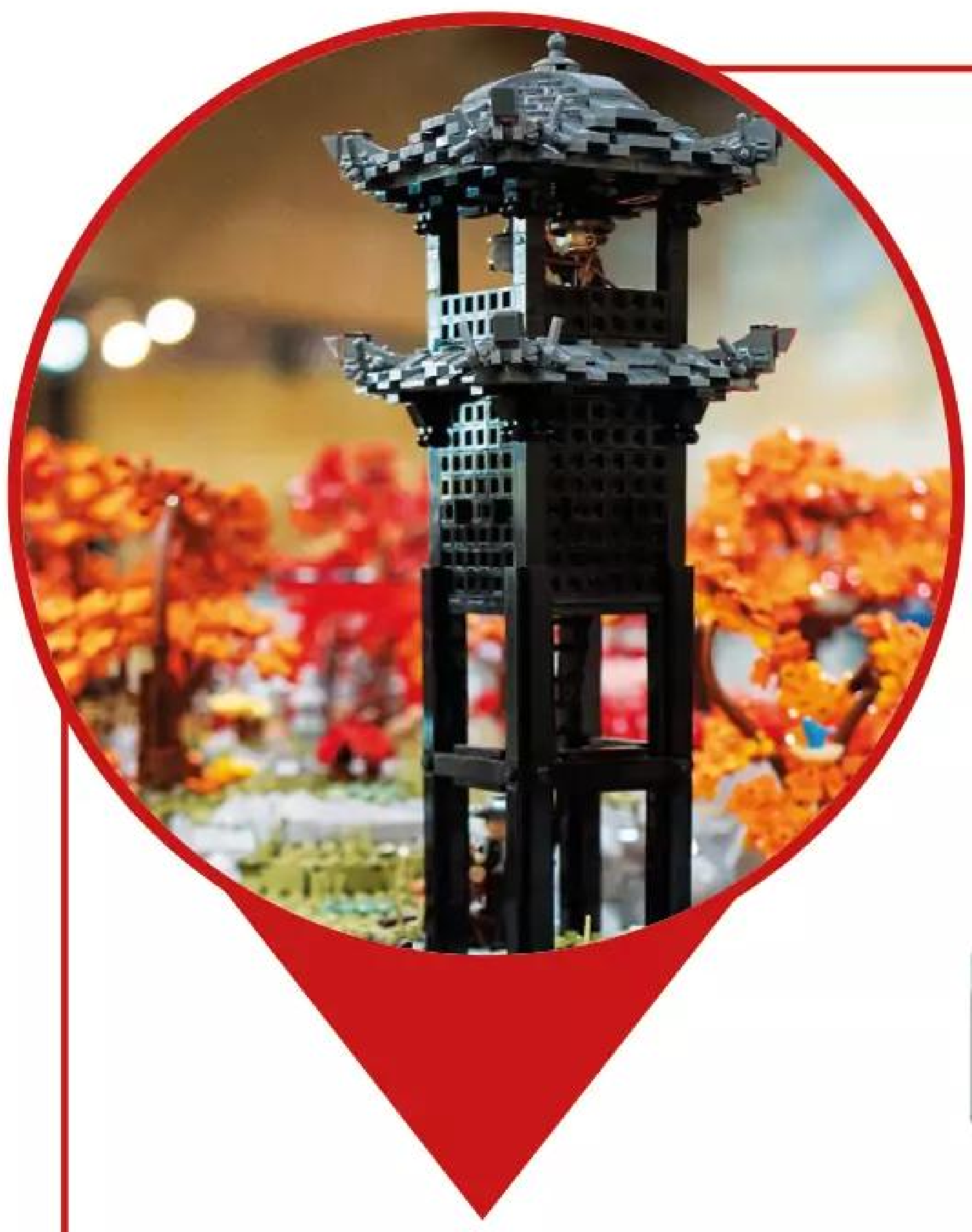
These large Technic panels turn out to be perfect for a curved roof when turned upside-down.



Part: *Ladder*
Bricklink Name: *Bar 7 x 3 with 2 U Clips*
ID: *6020*

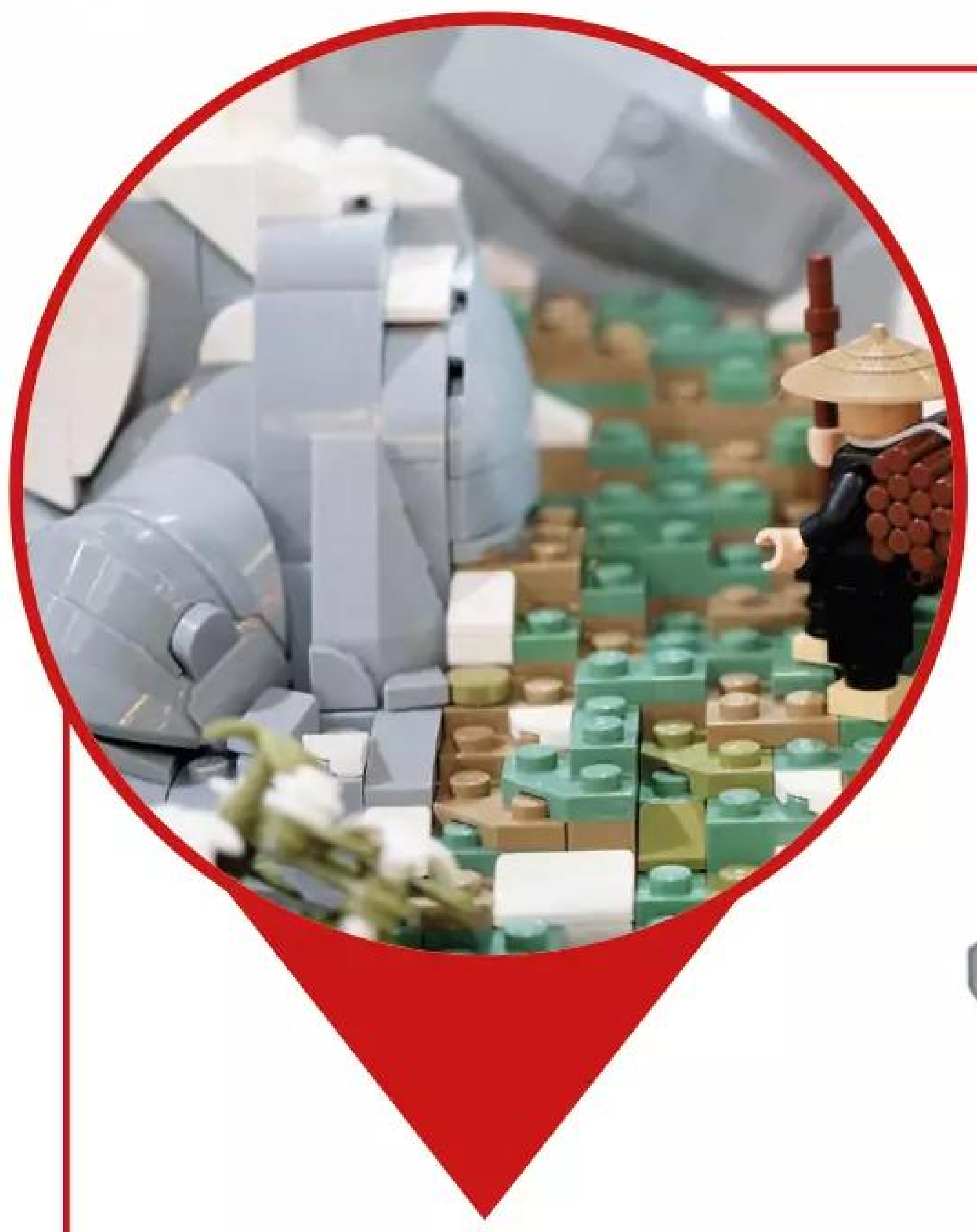


A few cheese slopes between each rung of this ladder create a unique texture for this small shack's wall.

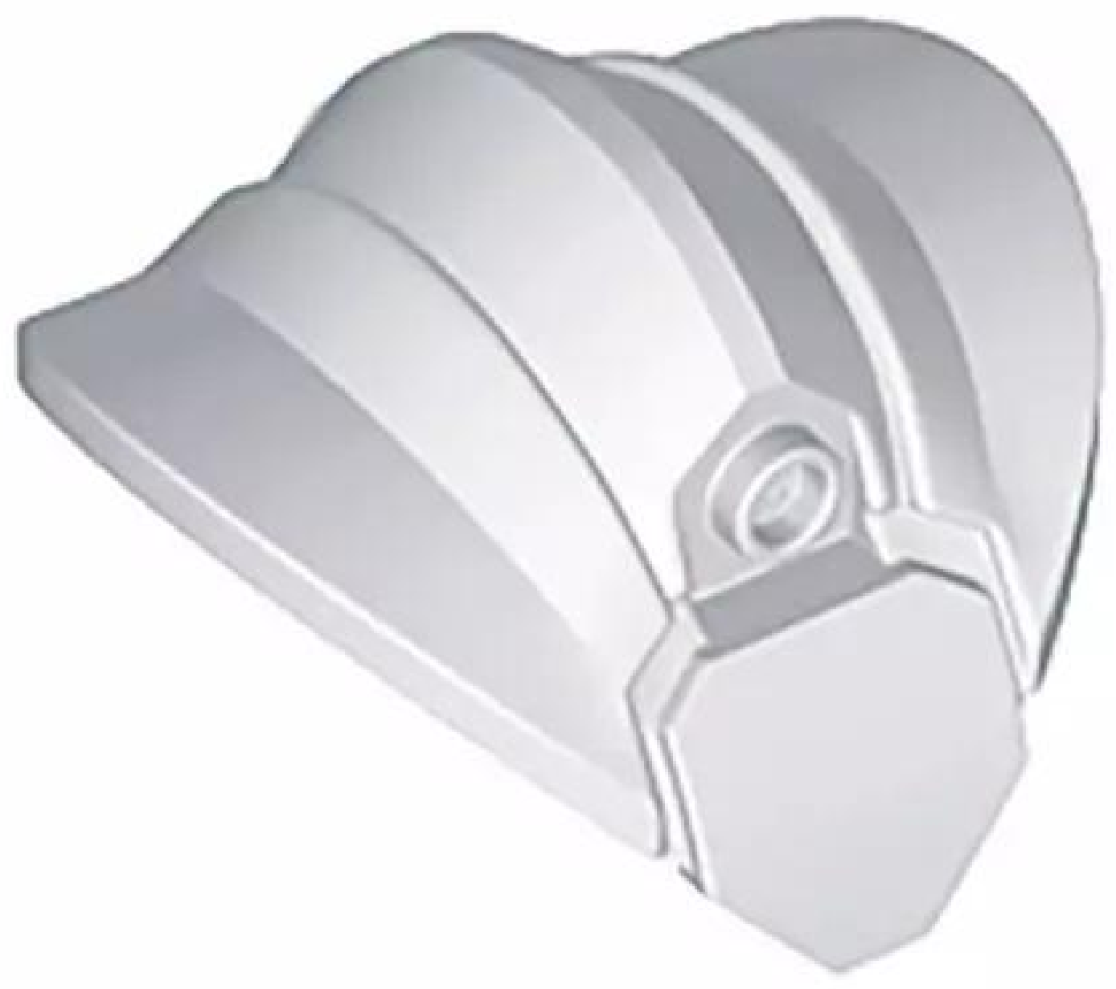


Part: *1x1 Plate*
Bricklink Name: *Plate 1 x 1*
ID: *3024*

Even the good old 1x1 plate can be seen in a new way. Reversed, it creates a fascinating texture for a watchtower.



Part: *Shoulder Armor*
Bricklink Name:
Large Figure Armor, Shoulder - 2 x 4 Brick Base with Curved Ends and Side Studs
ID: *49523*



Rocks come in all shapes and sizes — shoulder armour in light grey makes for a great boulder.

Build & chat with...

CHI WING LEE

Model Designer Chi Wing Lee tells Blocks Editor Graham E. Hancock about landing his dream job more quickly than he imagined, then discusses his varied work creating compelling models in the world of NINJAGO

Chi Wing Lee has always played with LEGO bricks and now as a LEGO professional he is the creative force behind striking models in NINJAGO. While building 10344 Lucky Bamboo, Chi tells Blocks about his journey to the LEGO Group, including his practical approach to choosing a degree, the challenges of starting work during the pandemic and how he discovered his passion for mechs.

Graham E. Hancock: Lee, what was your childhood experience of building LEGO sets?

Chi Wing Lee: It was my entire childhood, basically. I think I got my first LEGO set when I was five – it was a BIONICLE set.

Graham: Brilliant – which one?

Lee: I can never remember the names because in Hong Kong the names were in a Chinese translation, so it was just 'Water Warrior', 'Land Warrior', 'Air Warrior', stuff like that. But it was one of the little ones [8608 Vhisola]. It caught my attention back then and I never looked back.

Graham: Amazing. Where did that passion go – did you continue to focus on BIONICLE or move onto other themes?

Lee: It was BIONICLE for a while, then I think it was around 2005, 2006 when the Vikings sets came out that I moved over to other themes. It was actually the perfect transition because the Vikings sets had a lot of BIONICLE parts mixed into them and that might be what caught my attention. I remember seeing the big set in the wave, with the big catapult and dragon [7021 Viking Double Catapult vs the Armoured Ofnir Dragon] on sale in a department store and I really wanted it.

I found System bricks a lot more approachable when it came to making my own stuff, especially compared to BIONICLE. I made the switch and never looked back after that.

Graham: I know that now we're used to having big LEGO sets, but some of those Viking boxes were massive.

Lee: The boxes also had the great flaps.

Graham: Oh, those boxes… I spent so much time looking at them in the toy shop. When you got into System, how soon did you start to build your own things? Did it come quickly?

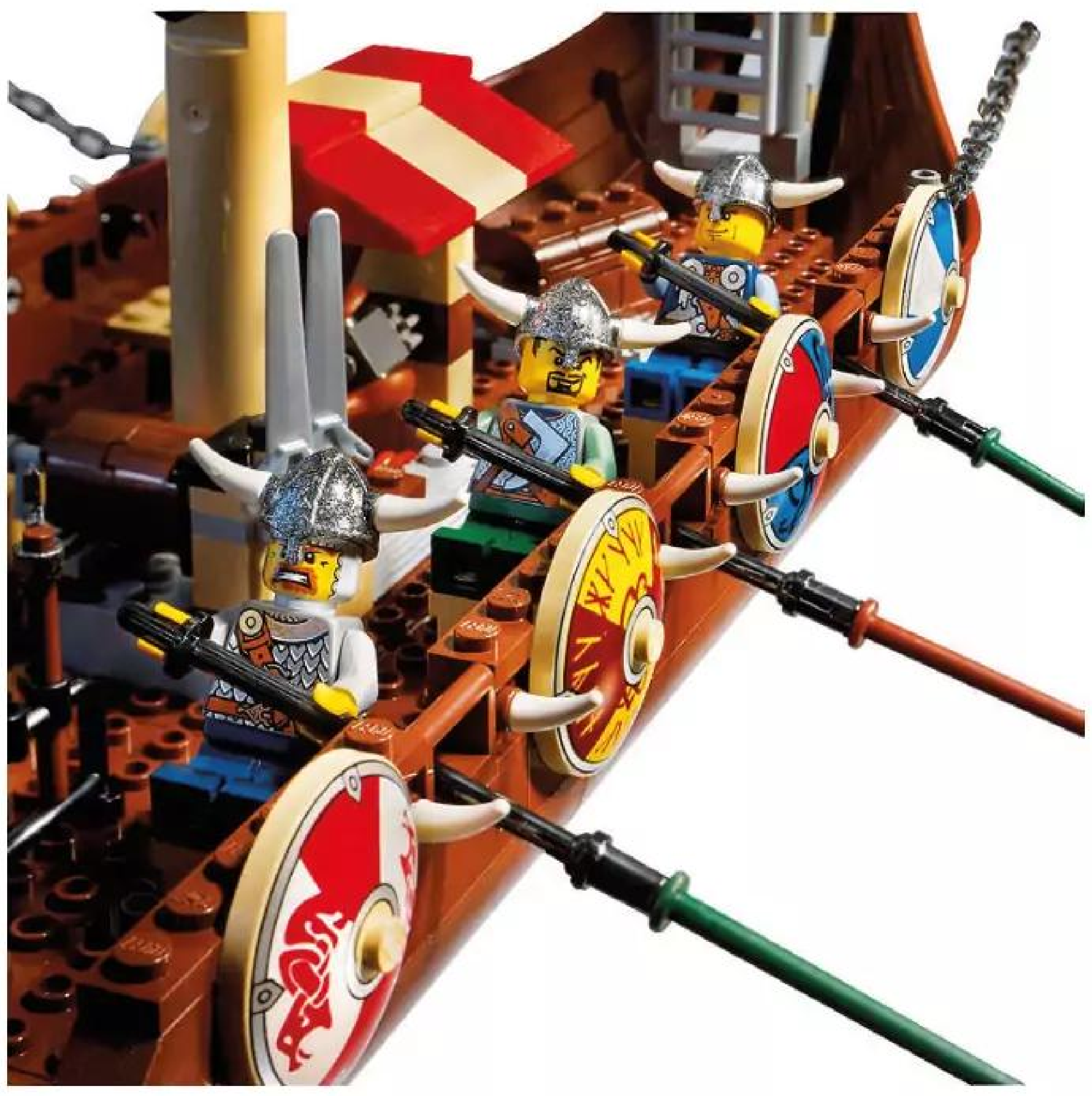
Lee: I think it was right away. I was familiar with System bricks because, like most people, I got a bunch of random bricks from my cousins when they grew out of them; I think I did a little BIONICLE MOC-ing as well back then too, but it was never fancy, just a figure doing something.

Then when the Vikings sets came out, it blew my mind how much more stuff I could build with the System bricks, with all of their colours and shapes; I know people do really cool stuff with BIONICLE parts, but I wasn't as good with them, in that sense System bricks are a lot more approachable.

Graham: You definitely have to think in a really particular way to get BIONICLE elements to do what you need them to do. What other kind of creative hobbies and things did you have as a child?

Lee: It was mostly LEGO building. I like to draw a little bit, I do arts and crafts sometimes, but nothing compares to my passion with building with LEGO bricks. I love creating stuff, but then with a lot

LEGO NINJAGO studios



Left: Lee was inspired by LEGO Vikings as a child.

Right: Vikings delivered large sets like 7019 Viking Fortress against the Fafnir Dragon.

of other arts and crafts, there is a requirement of craftsmanship and I never feel like I have that craft. [Laughs]

Or maybe I just have too high of a standard for myself that I never feel like my craftsmanship meets my demand. A lot of times when I start making arts and crafts, I have great ideas, but then I mess it up and it doesn't look as good as I want.

Whereas with LEGO bricks, it's very easy – there's still an art to it, to how things are connected, but it's not the same craftsmanship that requires steady hands and that you need to know how to use your tools. It's just plastic bricks that you can put together and take apart. When it's wrong, nothing is ruined forever; when you're drawing, you spend days on it and then you made one mistake and that's the end.

Graham: Did you keep building with LEGO bricks all the way through your teenage years?

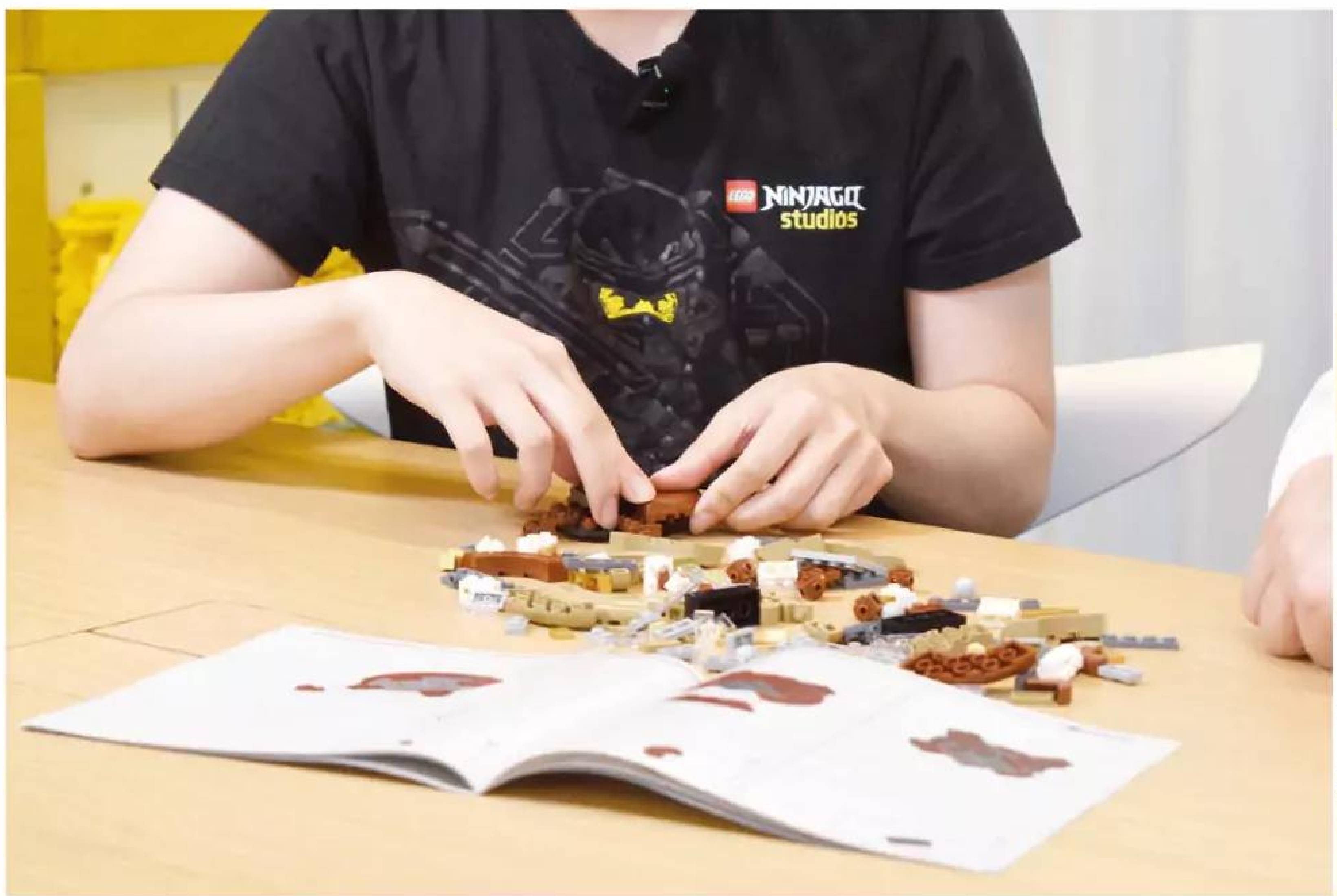
Lee: Yes, I think I was lucky that my parents were very encouraging of that, then also my friends always saw it as something cool, not as me just playing with toys. In that sense, I think it also really encouraged me to carry through with this hobby. I never really had a dark age.

Graham: It's so nice when you can keep going with it and stay connected to it all the way through. Did what you were building evolve over time? What sort of things did you like to build?

Lee: I think it changed a lot throughout the years, but back then, as a fan, I liked doing sculptures. I actually just saw one of my builds out there in Campus [the LEGO Group's main hub in Billund]. It is the one with the different types of art – I never knew it ended up here!

But I liked doing sculptural stuff, mostly animals and faces. Back then, as a fan, I always found it more fun to sculpt with LEGO bricks instead of creating buildings and cars. But then, when I got the job and came here, I realised that buildings and cars were going to be what I do, so when I first got here, part of me was a little bit worried about if I was really up for the task because it's so different from what I was used to doing. I mean, I knew the bricks and System, but wondered – can I really translate those skills to designing cars, dragons and buildings?

I think it all went well and now I prefer to do this stuff. It's more



fun to build toys than just a sculpture that sits there. So, yeah, it has changed a lot over the years.

Graham: What was your journey to joining the LEGO Group? What kind of education did you have and was it always with the goal of becoming a LEGO designer?

Lee: It's a bit yes and no – I studied Architectural Design for my Bachelor's degree. I see myself as a realistic person – I always knew that being a LEGO designer is an actual job and ever since I was a child I wished I could do that for work, but I also knew it is very specific. There is only one single place where you can become a LEGO designer; it's different to becoming a toy designer, because for that there are lots of different companies to choose from.

To me, working for the LEGO Group was always a fancy dream and I needed something to fall back on. When I was looking at other professions, I thought that being an architect is close enough and a lot of people told me the same, even some architect friends from the LEGO community who said it was just like building a big version of a LEGO building. [laughs]

Deep down, however, I thought that it was somewhat design related, so if I decided to apply for a job at the LEGO Group, it would still help. I didn't really enjoy the subject matter, but I don't regret my choice as I learnt a lot about design thinking, taking comments and input and the whole idea of what design looks like in a professional situation, instead of just building your own LEGO models. I do think that it helped in the end.

> “As a fan, I always found it more fun to sculpt with LEGO bricks instead of creating buildings and cars.”

Graham: Did you apply to the LEGO Group straight out of your degree, or did you do something else first?

Lee: I did do something else first for a little while, but I pretty much applied straight away. I didn't think it was going to happen, but you don't know if you don't try, so I gave it a try and it happened.

Graham: Were you successful the first time?

Lee: I was successful on my first try, but I didn't come over for the interview because I applied during the Covid pandemic. Everything was online, so I missed out on the legendary workshop… but maybe if I'd come over, I wouldn't have got the job.

But I actually had been to Billund before – I had a school trip to Norway where we spent around half a month there and on the last day I asked my teacher if I could sneak over to Billund because it's so expensive to visit all the way from Hong Kong and we were already so close. I had 24 hours and ran through everything, not knowing if I would ever be back – I tried to visit all the locations and see everything, but I guess now I have all the time I want.

Graham: When you started working for the company did you join remotely?

Lee: I worked remotely for a week, then I think they started loosening up the regulations so we could actually come in. But back then, it was still a very different experience. I was also the only newcomer at the time – I'd been delayed by a few months because of the travel restrictions and I had to travel to mainland China to get my visa. I thought when I'd arrive all of the other newcomers would be well established, but I learnt that I was the only person that came through that round of recruitment. I was the only new guy, I arrived in June just before summer vacation, so two weeks in everyone was gone and I was by myself in the office.

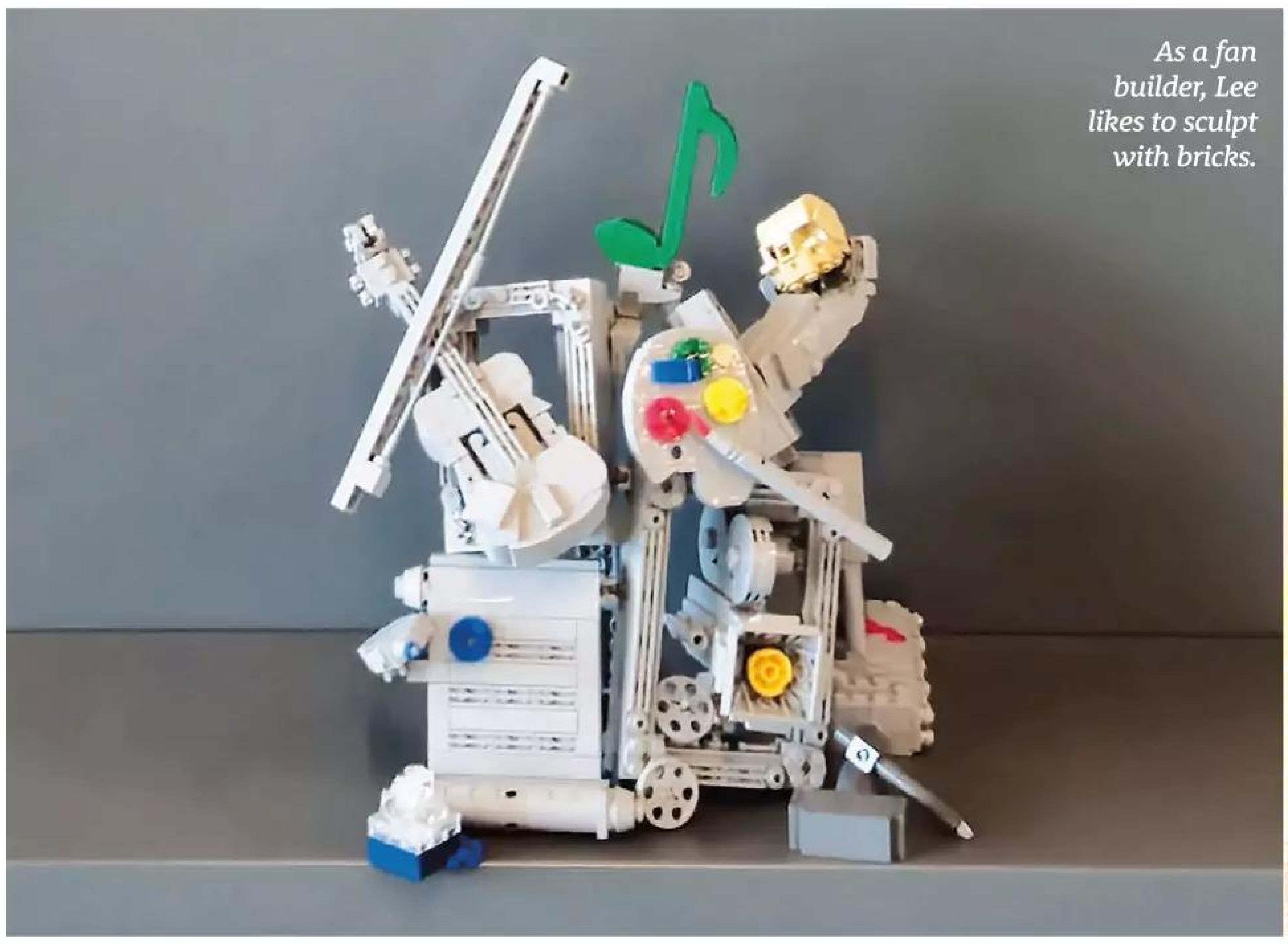
Graham: The famous Danish summer vacation! What team did you start on?

Lee: NINJAGO – and I've stayed there for four years now.

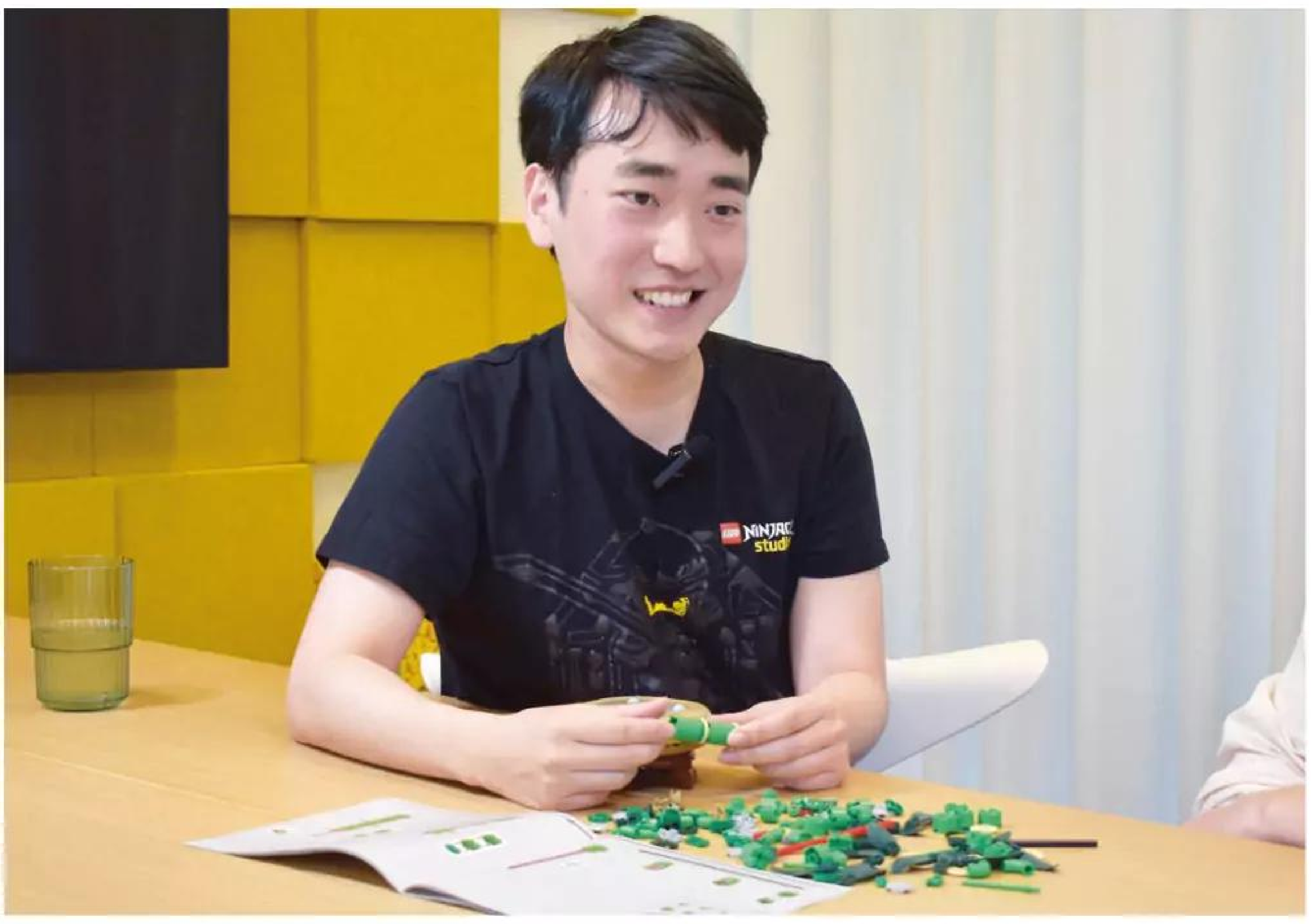
Graham: What was it like when you had the first Teams call with the NINJAGO gang?

Lee: It was overwhelming. There are faces that I'd know from before, designers that I had looked up to over the years and they're here now, and I'm supposed to work with them. The whole experience of being in the office and being part of the team was surreal for quite a while. Sometimes even now, I wake up and I'm like, ‘is this even real?’ It's amazing to be working as a LEGO designer.

Graham: What did you work on when you started?



As a fan builder, Lee likes to sculpt with bricks.



Lee: I think I was lucky and that I entered the right time – not that there's a wrong time to get the job – because we were jumping straight into a new wave of products. I joined in 2021 when we were looking into products for 2023, when we started NINJAGO Dragons Rising, which was a soft reboot. So in a way, I feel like I just hopped onboard alongside Sora and Aaron into this new journey with NINJAGO, which is pretty cool.

Graham: When you joined Dragons Rising, had the sets already been concepted and conceived of, or was the team still figuring out exactly what it would be?

Lee: I think there were a lot of work done already, especially because that was a whole new series. A lot of exploration had been done ahead of time, but there was still a lot to explore when I got here.

Graham: What was the first model you worked on?

Lee: I was actually very lucky, I got three models from my first launch – I'm very grateful for the trust the team had in me as a newcomer to take care of three models at the same time. I would consider all of them to be my first sets, in a way.

There was [71781 Lloyd's Mech Battle EVO], which was two little mechs, one for the Bone Warriors, then the golden Lloyd with his mech. Then there was [71800 Nya's Water Dragon EVO], which was also part of the EVO line.

And then [71784 Jay's Lightning Jet EVO], which even though it's the smallest is actually my favourite out of the three, because I had the most creative liberty with it. The formats of small mechs and dragons are already established so there's only so much you can do to switch things up. The jet was a surprising brief that came out of nowhere, but I was lucky that my boss trusted me.

Graham: When you were working on those first three sets, what were the early things you learnt about designing a model for the LEGO Group compared to building your own creations?

Lee: There really are infinite things to consider. I mean, in a way, you have the infinite resources, which is the impression a lot of people get when they think about working here. But there are also significant restrictions on what you can do, there's a lot to take into consideration regarding the age mark. Even before I joined the company, I was always trying to think about why certain decisions were made with products. A lot of my guesswork lined up with the truth, but there's so much more. There are lots of little things and rules that underpin each LEGO set you build; as a designer, you've got to think about how a young kid would interact with certain elements or with the model. It is all fascinating.

One of my professors in architecture used to say, 'it's only design work when there are restrictions.' I think that's very true. What I enjoy most about design are these restrictions. Even when I was building just as a fan I tried to restrict myself – I never used BrickLink and I always tried to only use the same pool of bricks I had collected over the years. Sometimes we would get bricks for an exhibition, but I tried very hard not to order a specific piece to build a model. There are already infinite possibilities with the bricks you have and the challenge is to make what you want – I don't want to take the fun out of it for myself.

Graham: Since you joined a theme that is so focused on play, what surprised you about the quality play checks the LEGO Group uses to test new sets?

Lee: I think it's always a little surprising to see how kids interact with them. You spend so many months in your own little office space, trying to think about all of the other things that people would do with them, then when you actually hand it to a kid, they may react very differently.

To be honest, I don't remember how I played with my LEGO models as a kid. Everything seems to be logical when I design a model in a specific way, but then as soon as you give it to a kid they come up with new ways to play with the models. They put a weapon in a new place or swap the minifigures. As a designer, you want to say 'no, Lloyd goes into that mech and that's the bad guy's mech.' There's always so much to learn when you see children playing with the model.

Graham: You designed 71795 Temple of the Dragon Energy Cores after doing a series of mechs – what is it like switching between different types of models, from vehicles to buildings?

Lee: It's intimidating. I think that's also what I really enjoy about being on the NINJAGO team – here, I think I've got myself into a really good place where my boss feels comfortable giving me whatever is needed. I don't want to be stereotyped or typecast as the mech guy or temple guy. Whenever we start concepting or finalising a model, we get asked if there's anything that really interests us and I always try to pick something different. Luckily enough, they usually let me do whatever I want.

Left: One of Lee's transforming mech sets is 71845 Lloyd's Jet Mech. It can transform into a flying vehicle.

Right: NINJAGO offers a range of sets, including locations like 71795 Temple of the Dragon Energy Cores.

Graham: You also worked on 71845 Lloyd's Jet Mech. The transforming mechs amaze me because they add such an extra layer of complication – do you approach them differently?

Lee: I don't even know how to describe it. I'll be honest, by the time I get the box in my hands and I build it for one last time before the rest of the world does, I often have no idea how I did it. [laughs]

This is pretty crazy and a fun fact – I was never a mech person before I came here. LEGO mechs have always terrified me the most. I'd only built one as a LEGO fan, when my LUG [LEGO User Group] did a project where we partnered with LEGO Hong Kong. The LEGO Group wanted some mechs for something and that was the first time I built one; it was not up to my standard at all. There is something very specific about how mechs look – of course, you start with two arms and legs, a simple shape, but to get it right artistically is a challenge.

I literally was given a masterclass from Niek van Slagmaat, who is the mech master, and I was lucky when he moved onto the concepting team they wanted someone else to do the big NINJAGO mechs. I was chosen to be Niek's student and the climber mech [71812 Kai's Ninja Climber Mech] was my graduation project.

> "I just hopped onboard alongside Sora and Aaron into this new journey."

Now, I'm sort of obsessed with mechs and when asked what I want to do it's usually mechs. My second one was [71834 Zane's Ultra Combiner Mech] and that has a fun story to it because I didn't really want to do it; when I got hired, one of my biggest fears was what if the day comes when I have to do something that I'm not interested in. I was not sure if I would be able to make something that lives up to my own expectations if I'm not passionate about the idea.

But with the Combiner Mech, when I first heard the concept, I wasn't too happy with it – why is Zane part of the mech and Riyu on the back? I told myself that this is the moment for you to prove you are up for the job and instead of not wanting to do it, I had to think more about translating the concept into something I would want to work on.

There was the concept that Riyu had to be on the back, but I had to justify why – instead of just following the 'rule of cool,' I started coming up with my own narrative. I began to think what if the whole mech was Riyu's armour? He's a teenage dragon at this point, so he's still not huge, and the vehicles come together to help him fight something bigger. Suddenly everything just clicked in my head and I started enjoying it. That's not the last time this happened; when I first approach a concept where I'm not too sure, I just remind myself I've done it before and can do it again.

Graham: That makes sense, it's about finding a way into the project you're working on. You've also worked on the micro NINJAGO City sets – how did they come about?

Lee: That was a passion project during the year. There's always some downtime when we're waiting for the higher ups to make the decisions on which concepts go through and to confirm which models will become products. As a team, we just chill and hang out, whilst also seeing what we can come up with.

That year, it was when the [71799] NINJAGO City Markets was already done and about to come out. I've always loved building micro scale models and I've always wanted to try my hand at the NINJAGO City models in this style. So many people have done it already and I think a lot of them did an amazing job. I didn't want to make something redundant, but with the NINJAGO City Markets, this was the first time I had the upper hand because the product hadn't been released yet. No one else had the chance to make a micro scale of it, except for me. [laughs]

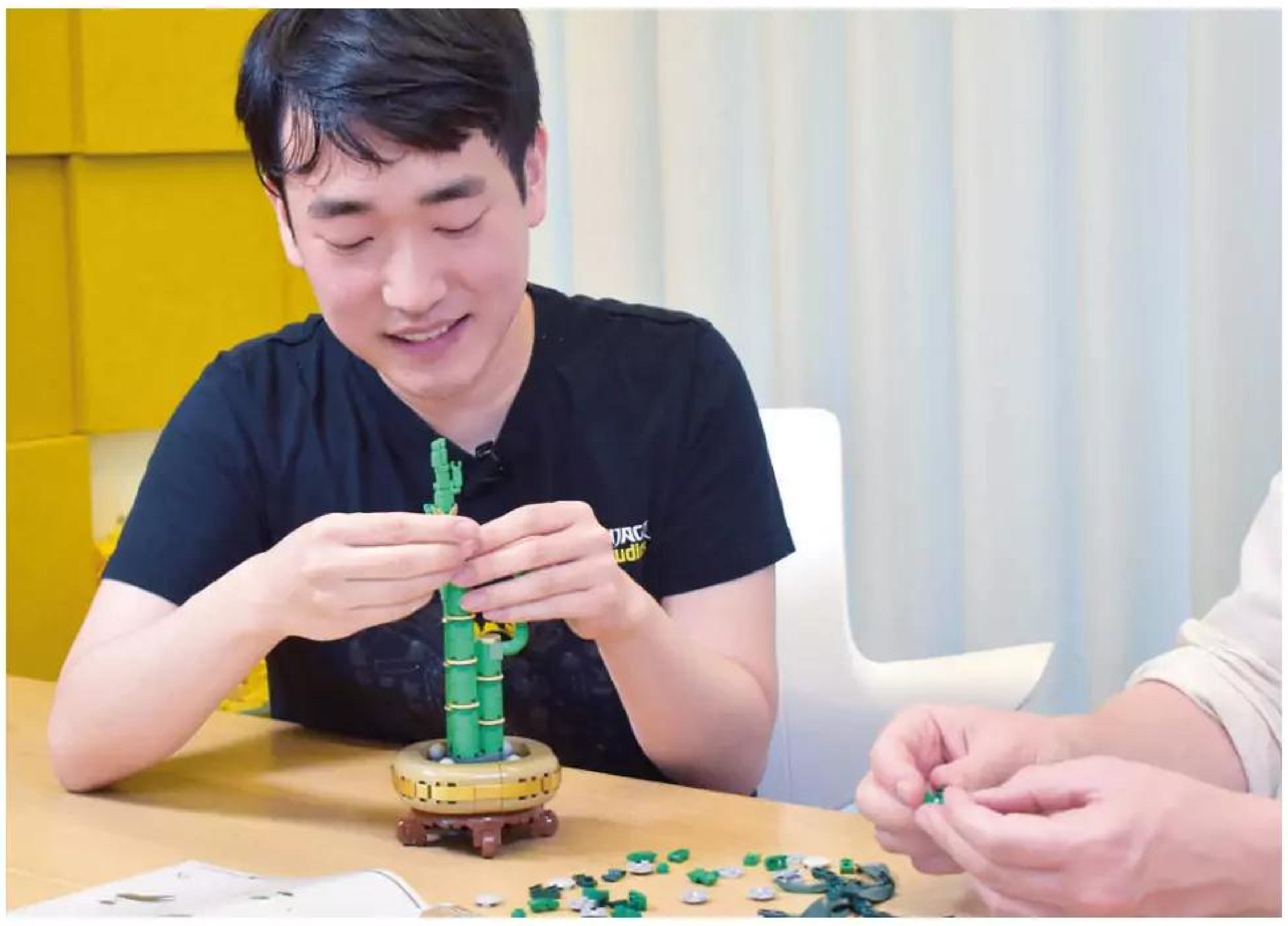
I took the time to make it, then I thought I might as well pitch it as a product. For that, I should also do the rest of them and just pitch the whole thing as a collection. As soon as the marketing people saw it, they thought it had to happen.

Graham: It's fabulous that you came up with the concept for them.

Lee: In a way. I mean, I'm not going to pretend that doing a micro scale of an existing model was a groundbreaking idea.

Graham: But it's not that common for them to be official sets and to have a little collection that you can put together. I think that is what works so well about them, they connect just like with the big models.

Lee: I also made sure that they are compatible with the mini



Left: 71784 Jay's Lightning Jet EVO was one of Lee's first sets.

Right: Lee sought to include play in 71819 Dragon Stone Shrine.

modulars that came before, just like how the real NINJAGO City sets are compatible with the other modulars.

Graham: That's such a fun detail.

Lee: That's what I based my scale on. When I started working on them, I just looked up the old VIP program exclusive mini modulars and based it on that scale, the same connection point, everything.

Graham: I also need to ask about my favourite NINJAGO set of all time, 71819 Dragon Stone Shrine – what's the story there?

Lee: That was also kind of a passion project. We know NINJAGO has been here for so many years and there's a passion in the office to do something for the older NINJAGO fans, but we didn't really know what that could be. At the time, a lot of different things were being explored and I wasn't even given the task to explore it.

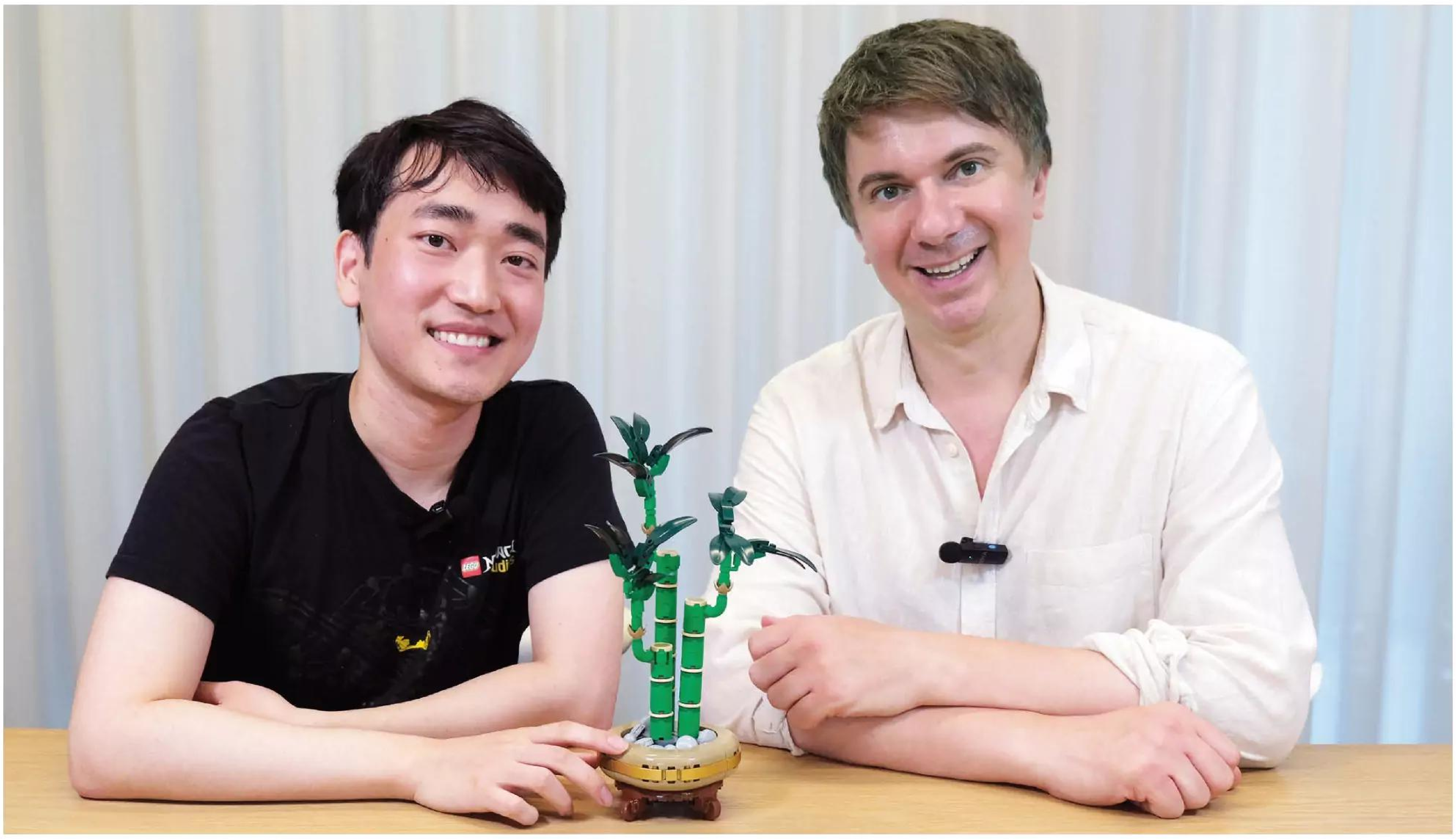
There is a week where we have something called 'creative boost', where we get to do our own thing. I just asked my boss if I could give the brief a try because I'd had this idea stuck in my head for years. I'd seen people use rock pieces, not LEGO bricks, to make these stone sculptures and I'd always thought they were super cool. I had wanted to do one in LEGO form but had never gotten around to doing it. I thought putting a NINJAGO spin on it, with a dragon, all the cool characters and the cherry blossom behind it, would be a really cool thing as a product. My boss encouraged me to try it and see how it went; everyone in the office loved it, it did well at the tests and then it was agreed it would become a full model.

> "I had to think about translating the concept into something I would want to work on."

Graham: What was your favourite thing about the way it turned out?

Lee: I have a controversial opinion here. I know a lot of fans said that the official set is missing a base plate because we did the base plate for an influencer box, but the thing I love about the model, actually, is that it doesn't have a base. It should curve at the bottom. A lot of the time, when we make bigger models, we fall into the trap of everything having to fit together, to fit with the modulars, and sets can lose their charm a bit. I was really happy when I managed to convince the team that this is its own thing – it should look organic. It's a display piece to put on your desktop or shelf, so it doesn't need a base.

I also like that it does have some play features. A lot of the time we think of sets either as display or play pieces, but I really wanted to prove with this model it can be both. Obviously, it can still lean into one or the other, and that one is obviously more of a display set, but that doesn't mean it can't have a play feature, just the same as I think a play model can look beautiful on display.



Blocks

HAPPY BIRTHDAY
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BUILDING, COLLECTING AND CUSTOMISING YOUR LEGO
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HE'S BACK! YOUR FAVOURITE POSTIE! GET YOURS NOW AT

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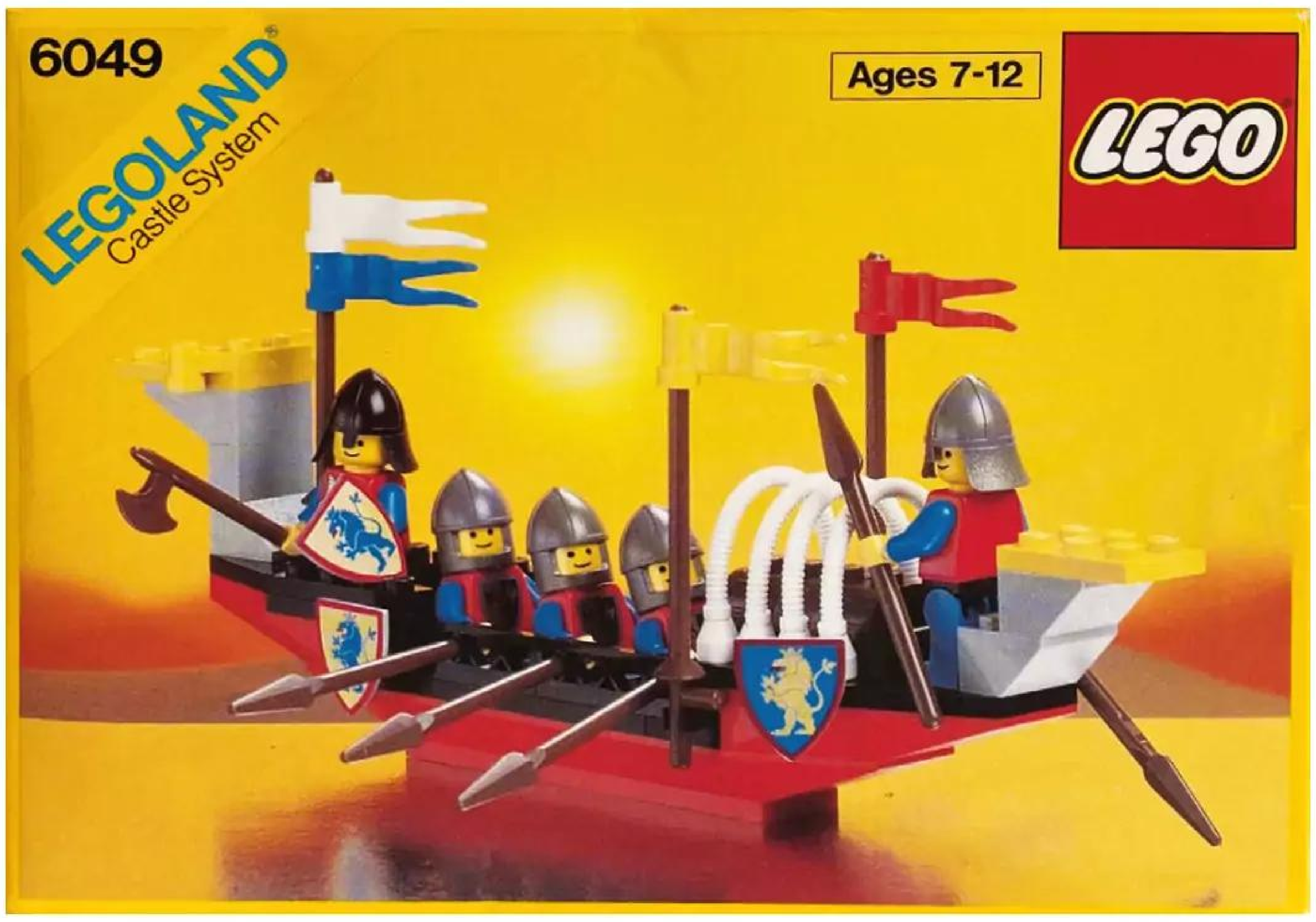
1987

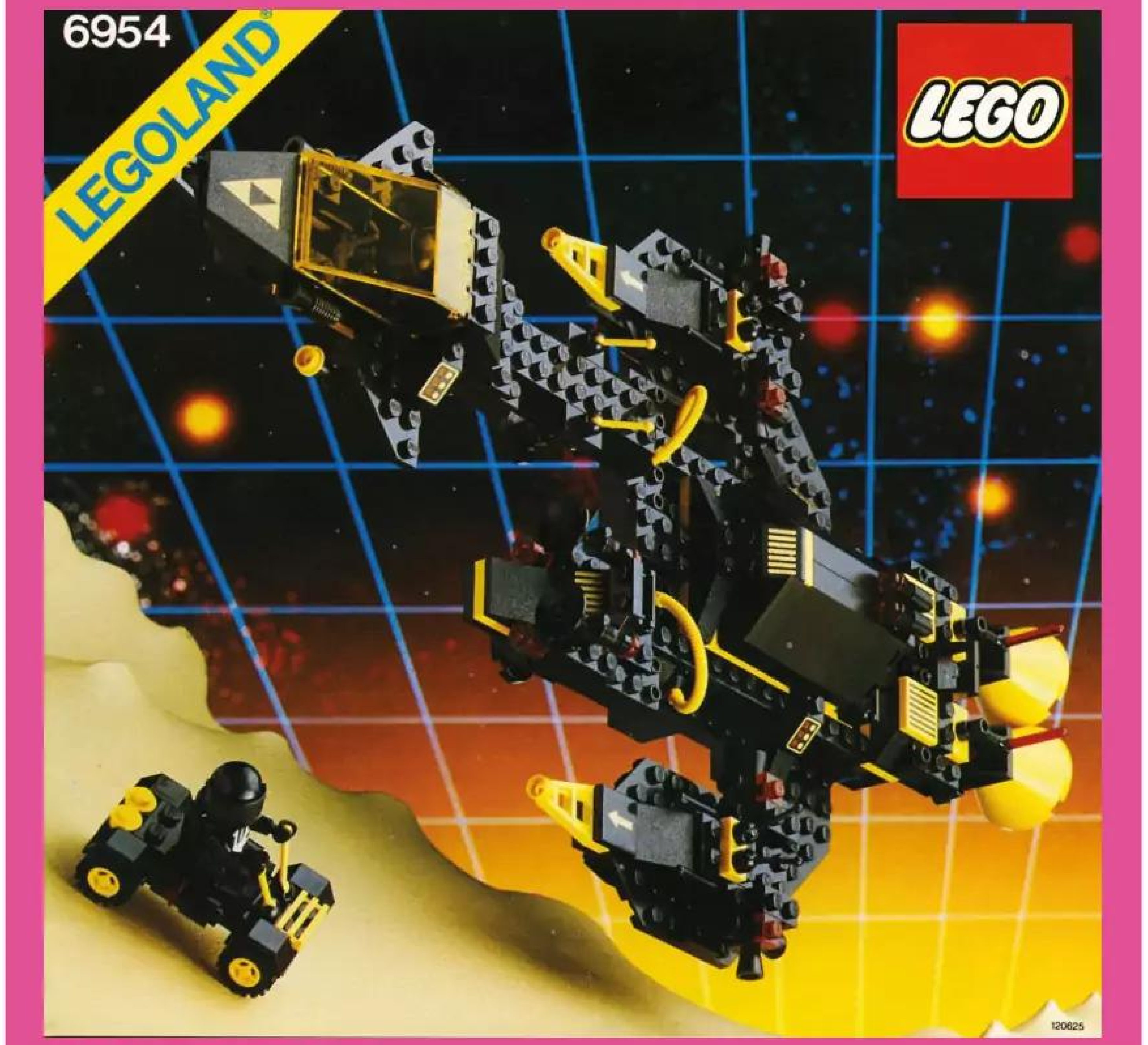
FOR UNDER £20 YOU COULD BUY...



6049 VIKING VOYAGER

At first glance 6049 Viking Voyager looks like a solid LEGO Castle battle pack, but take a closer look and suspicious cracks start to appear. For instance, the box says ‘Viking’ Voyager but these are clearly just Lion Knights. And they probably won’t be sailing very far with spears for oars, but we’ll forgive them that one given the dedicated LEGO oar piece was still a couple of years away from entering production. It’s a pretty groovy boat nonetheless and with five of the newly-introduced Lions in tow it was indeed a solid battle pack after all – at only $11.

FOR UNDER £50 YOU COULD BUY...



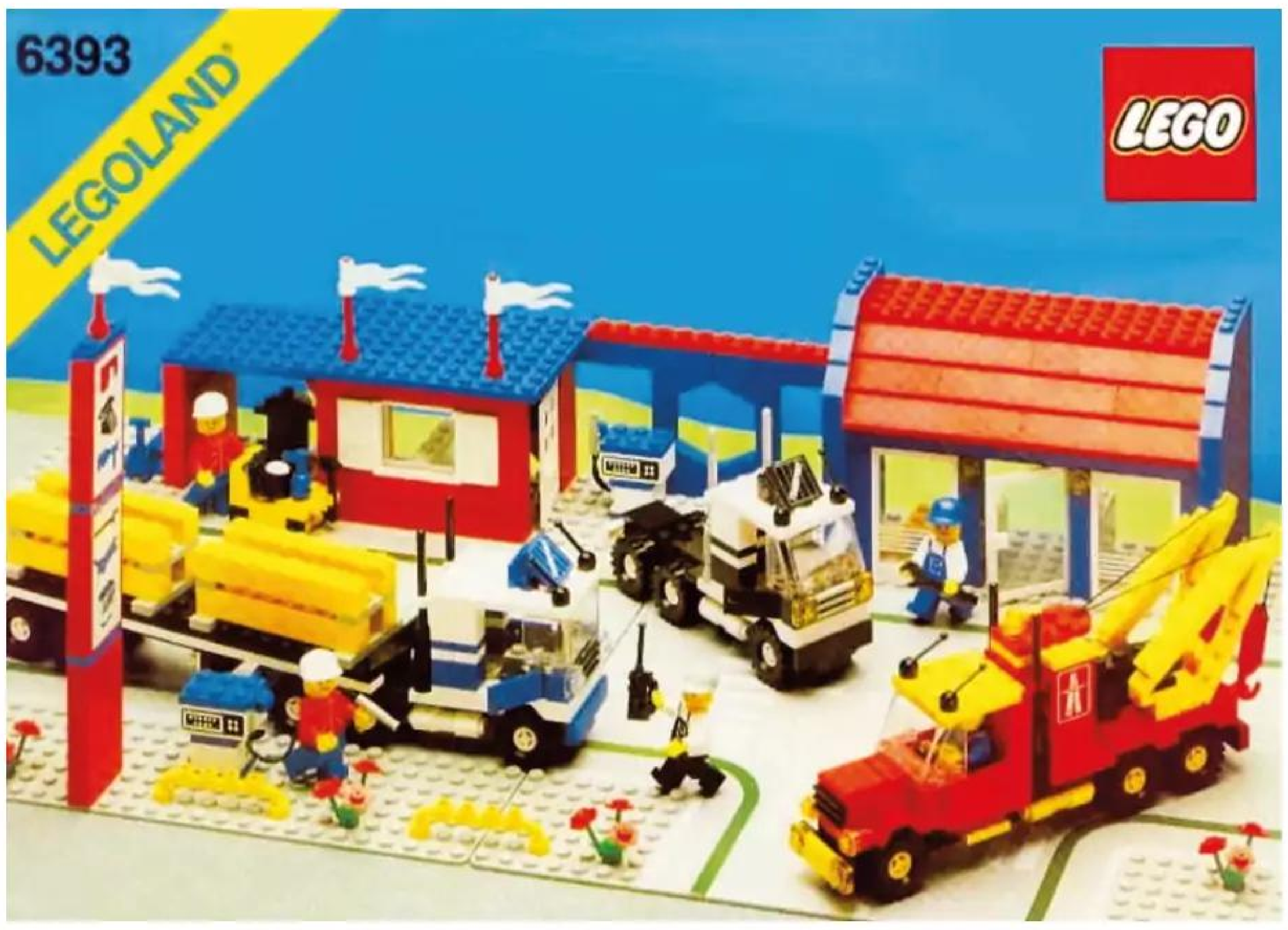
6954 RENEGADE

The LEGO Group kicked off 2025 with a blast from the past in 10355 Blacktron Renegade, a 1,151-piece remake of the slightly humbler 6954 Renegade, which had much the same impact some 38 years prior using only 315 elements. It’s a little more rudimentary in its approach, of course, but it’s all the more charming and memorable for it. Its colour scheme is still iconic, it’s just as modular as the newer version and it can be yours today for the low, low price of £900 new. Best stick with the remake...

FOR UNDER £100 YOU COULD BUY...

6393 BIG RIG TRUCK STOP

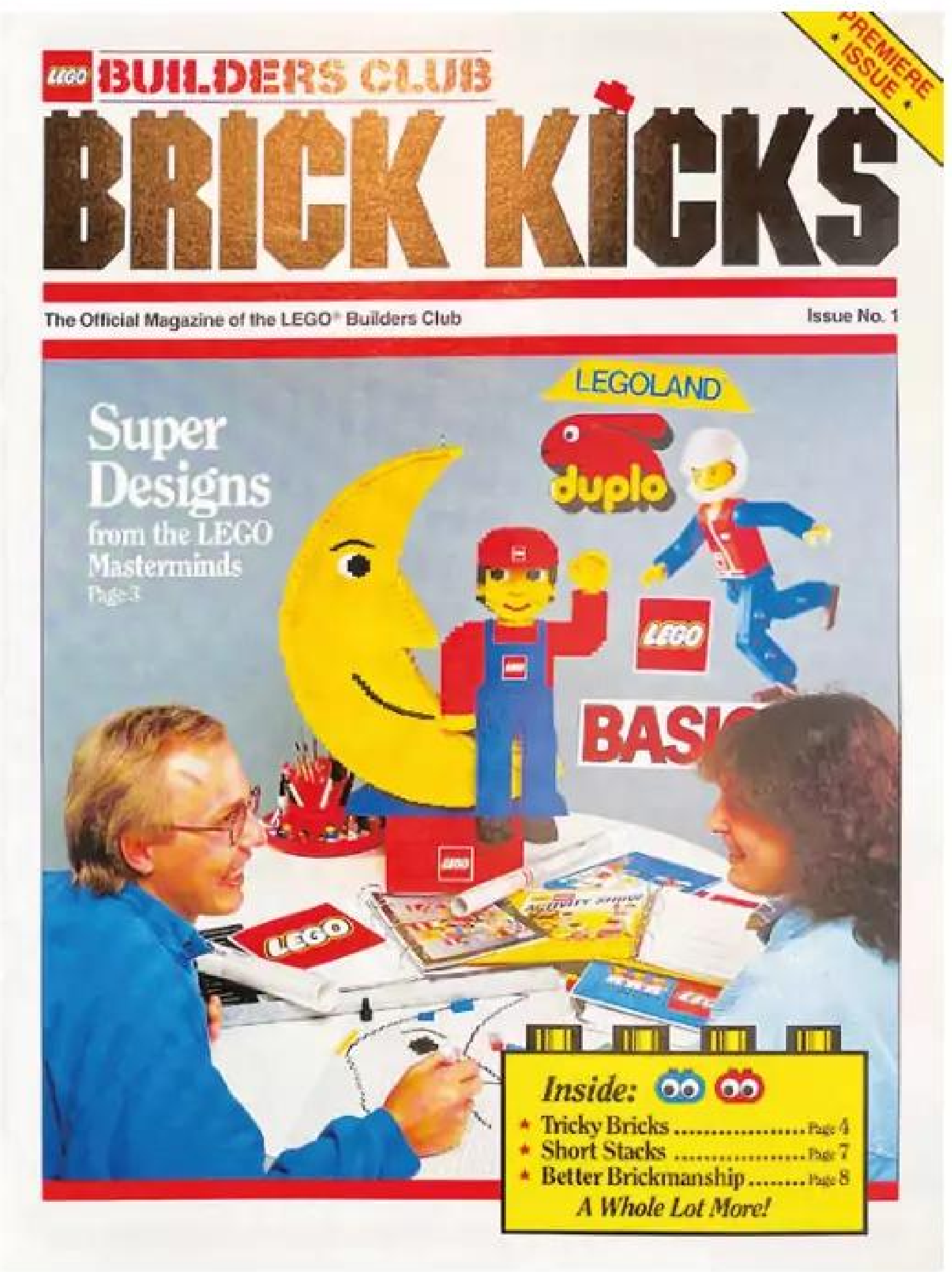
Has any retro LEGO set featured in these pages epitomised the amount of ‘stuff’ you used to get in a single box more than 6393 Big Rig Truck Stop? It’s certainly up there with the most sprawling of them all, putting its meagre 621 pieces to incredible use across two baseplates, two buildings (a truck stop diner and an office), two cabs, a trailer that can be hitched to either of them, a fully-functional tow truck and five minifigures. Compare the play value to a modern 600-piece set and it’s really no contest at all.



TIME TO SPLIT

The humble brick separator is so commonplace these days – most of us probably have more than we know what to do with at this point – that it's hard to imagine a time when it didn't exist. But that time was 1986 (and earlier), because the very first tool for splitting apart interlocked bricks only arrived on the scene in 1987. Presumably the years before that were plagued by pieces littered with teeth and fingernail marks as frustrated builders tried to pry apart a pair of 2x2 plates. All hail the humble brick separator…

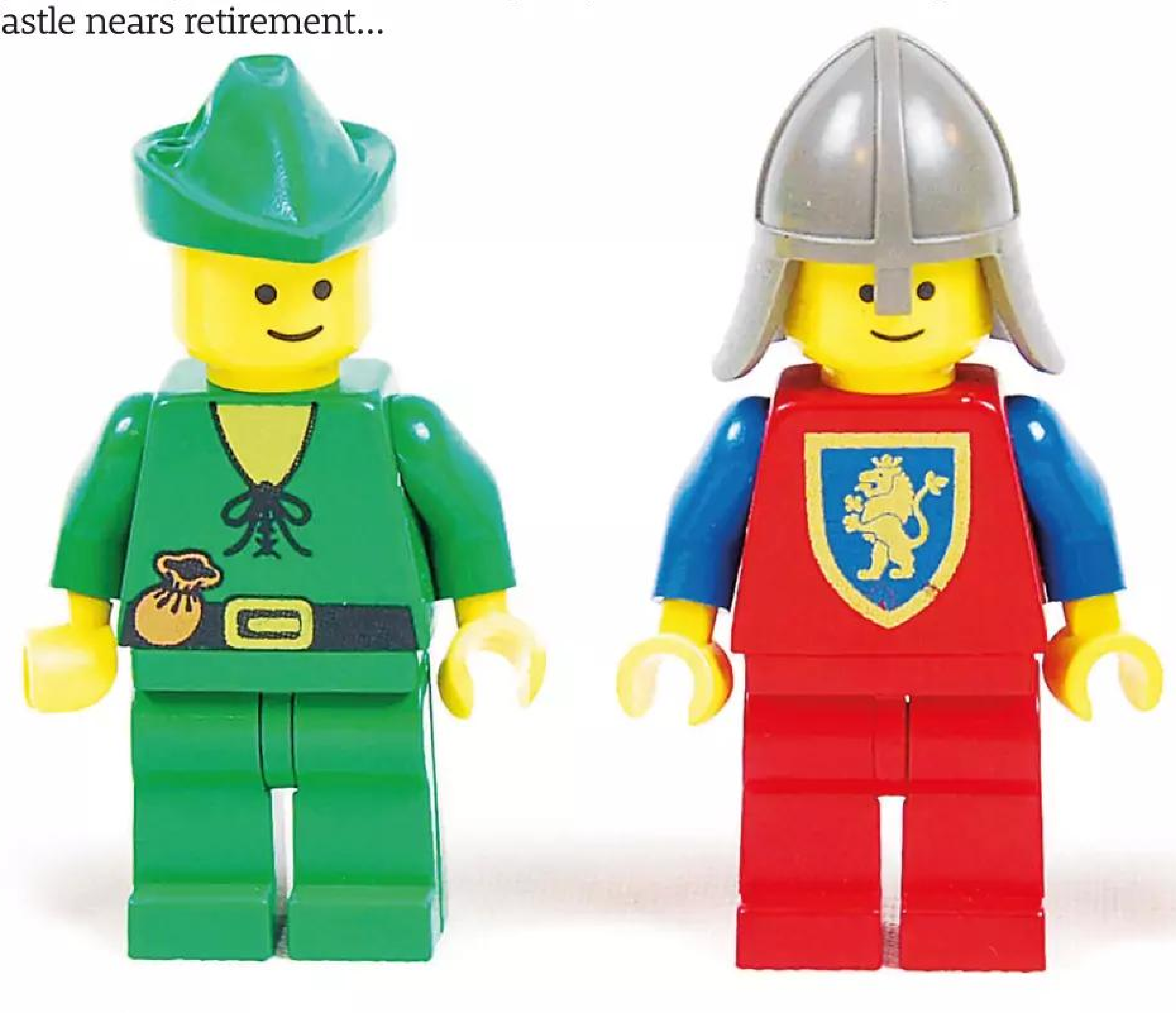
JOIN THE CLUB


PREMIERE ISSUE
LEGO BUILDERS CLUB
BRICK KICKS
The Official Magazine of the LEGO® Builders Club
Issue No. 1
Super Designs from the LEGO Masterminds Page 3
LEGOLAND
duplo
LEGO
BASIC
Inside:
Tricky Bricks .... Page 4
Short Stacks .... Page 7
Better Brickmanship .... Page 8
A Whole Lot More!

The title you're holding in your hands is a sprightly 11 years old, but LEGO magazines have existed in some shape or form for decades. One of those was Brick Kicks, a seasonal mag published four times a year and only available with a paid membership to LEGO Club, which officially launched in the US in 1987. This early attempt at community building initially championed members' builds but slowly gave up its pages to more and more ads, which eventually led to the end of paid club memberships. Today's official LEGO magazine for children is free of charge.

CALLING ALL CASTLES

1987 was a major year for LEGO Castle, with two of the most memorable factions making their debut within a 12-month period. Just imagine that happening today… what's that? We've had four new factions in 2025? Well, they're probably not quite as classic yet as the Lion Knights and Forestmen. Both factions have reappeared multiple times in modern-day Castle sets, though their time in the spotlight seems to be fading now as 10305 Lion Knights' Castle nears retirement…



Meanwhile, outside the LEGO bubble...

HIGHEST GROSSING MOVIE
THREE MEN AND A BABY

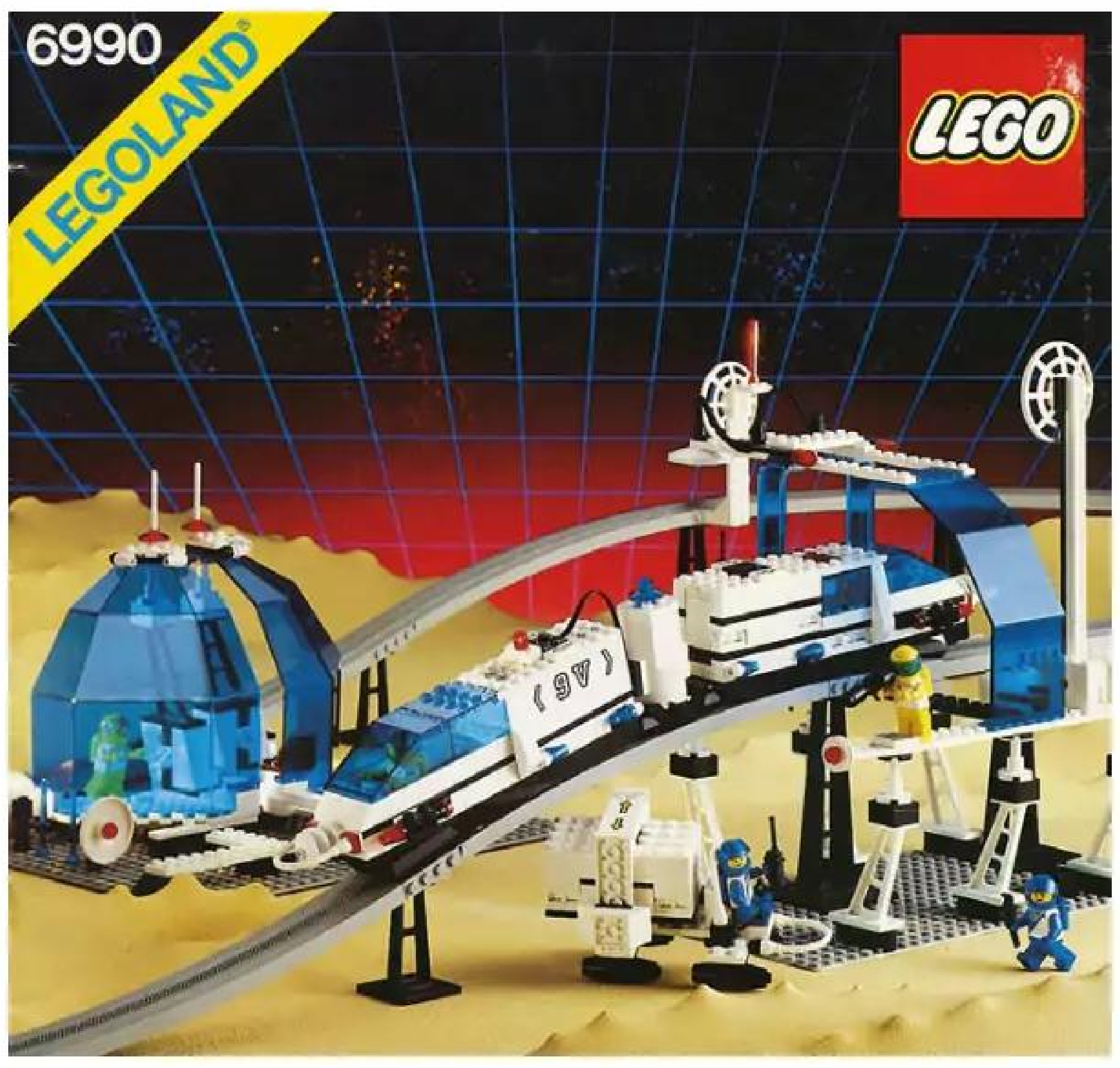
BEST SELLING ALBUM
BAD (MICHAEL JACKSON)

BEST SELLING GAME
OUT RUN

BEST SELLING BOOK
BELOVED

SUPER BOWL WINNING TEAM
NEW YORK GIANTS

Biggest Set


6990
LEGOLAND
LEGO

6990 Monorail Transport System (731 pieces)

203
SETS RELEASED

Classic Catalogue

15 p
LEGO
LEGO® Catalogue 1987

Time Cruising

Travelling back through the years to look at some of the most memorable LEGO items

THEME

1970
MINITALIA

LEGO
minitalia
Per bambini da 4 anni in poi
Il gioco vivo come la sua fantasia.

If you've ever bought a bulk lot of old LEGO elements, perhaps from an international seller, and come across some pieces that feel just a little bit off… you might have been holding Minitalia bricks. Available exclusively in Italy in the 1970s, the Minitalia theme ran for six years total and comprised 21 sets.

Like Samsonite in the US, Minitalia was a licensee of the LEGO Group – specialist pieces like boat hulls were provided directly by the Danish company, but everything else was the product of Minitalia's own moulding machines.

The elements are easily distinguished from LEGO bricks by their hollow studs (and therefore the absence of the LEGO logo), as well as the X that replaced the hollow tube on the underside of many pieces, but keener eyes will also notice that the material used to produce them was slightly different.

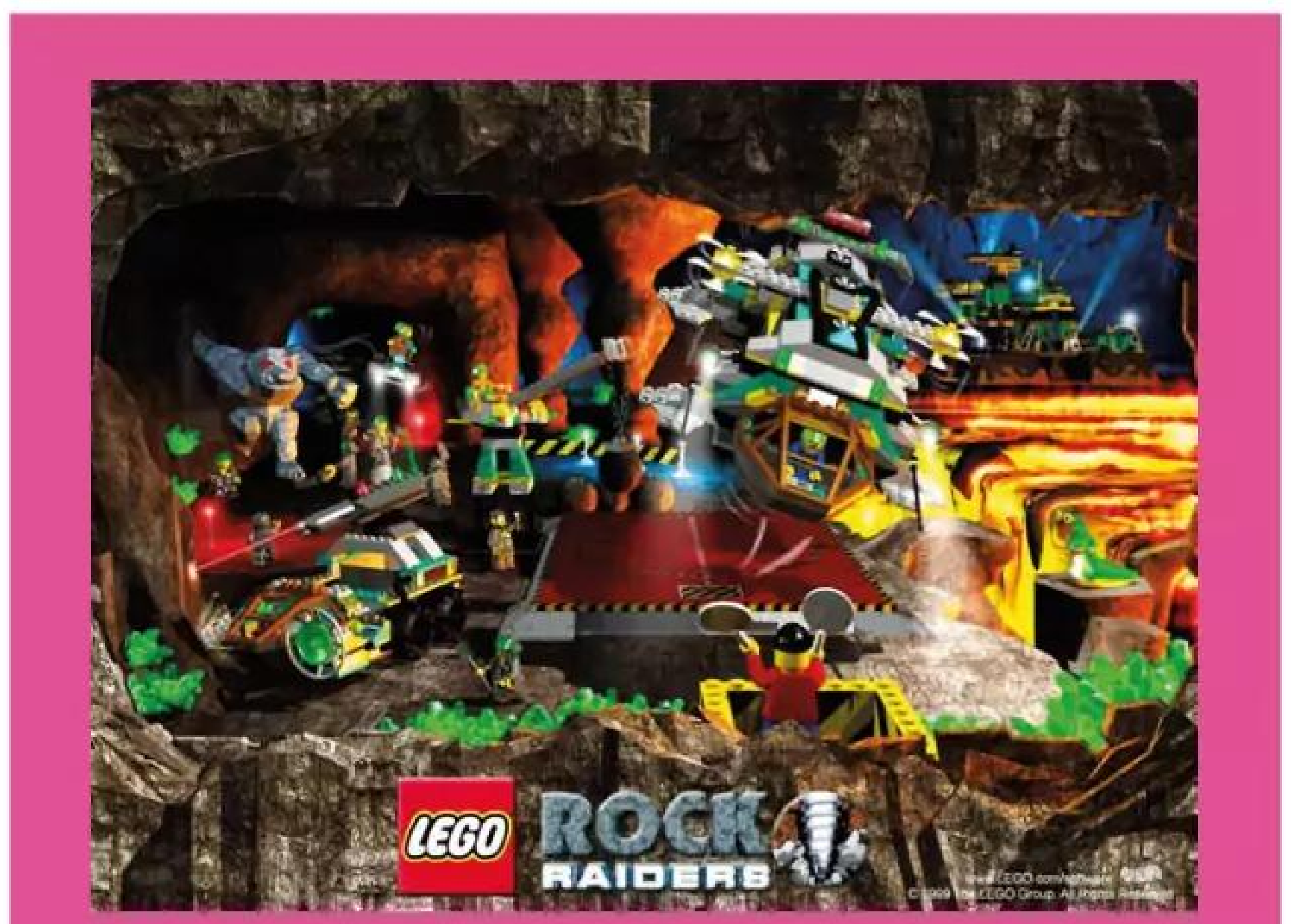
These were not the same acrylonitrile butadiene styrene (ABS) that still forms the core of almost all official LEGO elements, nor even the cellulose acetate (CA) used for the very first LEGO bricks in 1949. Instead, Minitalia pieces were moulded from a lighter plastic that also gave them slightly duller colour tones.

It petered out after only two real waves. The first arrived at the beginning of the decade, exclusively branded Minitalia, while the second arrived towards the end, dropping the Minitalia logo and mixing in regular LEGO pieces with Minitalia's doors and windows.

Chances are you'd have to be pretty lucky (or unlucky, perhaps) to stumble across any Minitalia bricks in the wild today, but you never know. Look out for those telltale signs and you may just have an odd piece of LEGO history on your hands…

VIDEO GAME

1999
LEGO ROCK RAIDERS



For the most part, modern video games offer pretty much the same experience across whichever platform you happen to be playing them on, save for things like particular control schemes (playing on a keyboard and mouse versus waving a Joycon around, for example). Not so at the close of the 20th century, however, as the LEGO Group waved goodbye to the 1990s with two strangely different LEGO Rock Raiders games on PlayStation and PC.

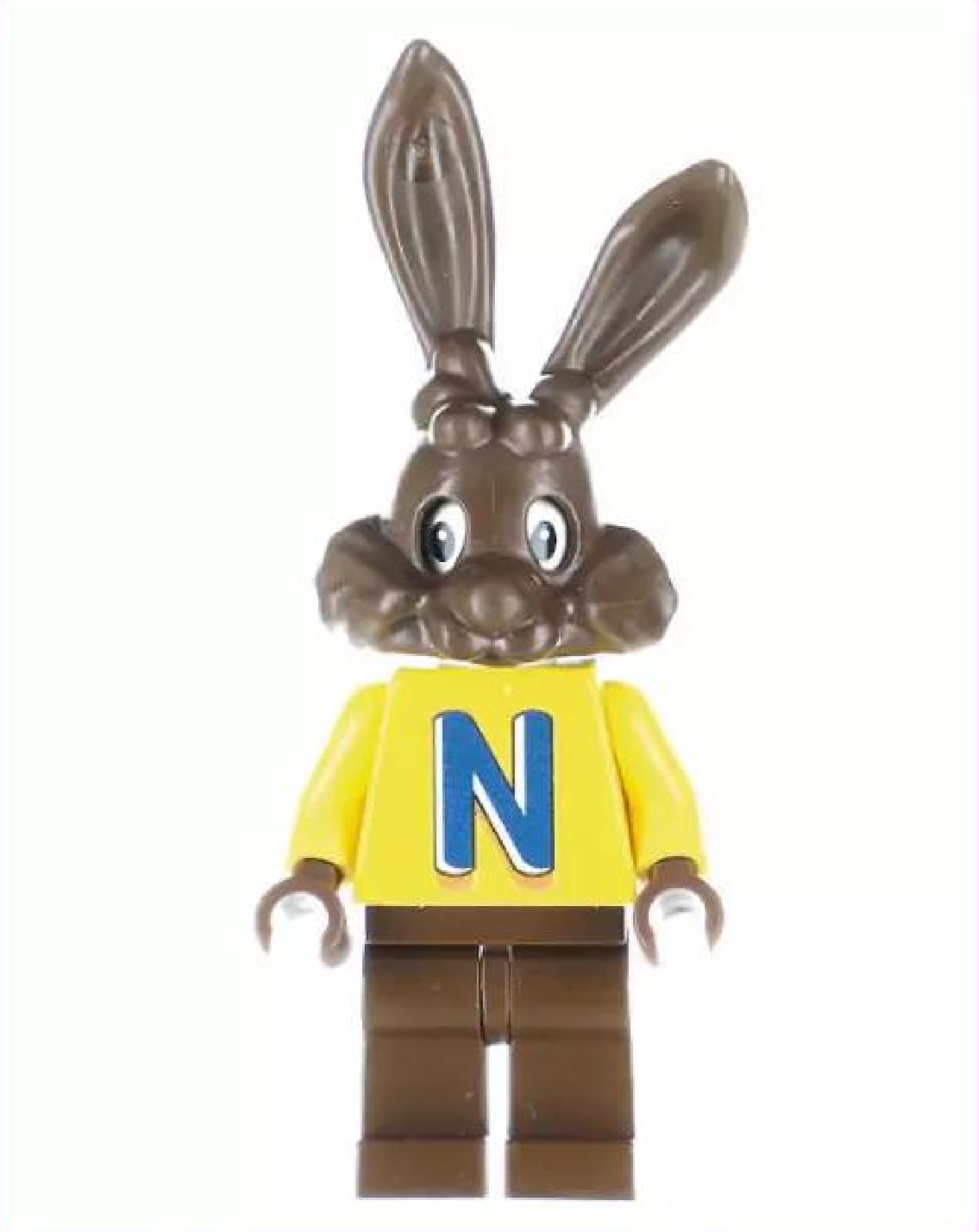
If you booted it up on Windows, you'd have been greeted by a real time strategy game that put you in command of a squad of raiders as they mined for energy crystals. But if you were popping the disc in a console and picking up a Dualshock, you'd have found yourself in the driving seat of a particular player character (Bandit, Doc, Sparks, Axle or Jet) rather than commanding an entire squad. The thrust of the game was still the same – collect energy crystals, rescue fellow Rock Raiders trapped by landslides – but with a clearer focus on action and exploration.

That split approach apparently wasn't the original intention of developers Data Design Interactive, however. According to David Upchurch, who oversaw development of the PlayStation version, LEGO Media decreed only six months before the game was due to be submitted to Sony that the real-time strategy genre didn't work on consoles and the focus had to change.

"Right from the start, we knew it was going to be impossible to create a great game – we simply didn't have the time or resources," Upchurch later wrote, describing the task as a 'poison chalice'. The result was a game that's not exactly fondly remembered today – but does have a cult fanbase, including one solo developer who's remade it from the ground up under the title 'Manic Miners'. It's free to download online and very much worth checking out if you do have any nostalgia for the original.

MINIFIGURE

2001
QUICKY THE BUNNY



If you're looking at the recent Nike sets and thinking they come across a bit corporate, well, the LEGO Group has history in that department. A curious LEGO curio if ever there was one, Quicky the Bunny is the mascot of Nestlé's Nesquik brand, who somehow made his way into a couple of promotional LEGO polybags in the early 2000s. His unique headpiece is definitely the most interesting thing about him, though the white head underneath is probably the most chilling (was the smile really necessary?)

Quicky's two Studios appearances in 2001 were followed by a surprise return in 2002's 4299 Quicky Racer, a LEGO Racers polybag that combined its small pullback cars and single-piece body element with the Nestlé rabbit's head and a handful of Nesquik stickers.

There are only two of those for sale on BrickLink at the time of writing and the sealed one will set you back around £75. You're looking at an even loftier price to pick up the full Quicky minifigure, which most recently sold on BrickLink for just shy of £114 new.

There's surprisingly little history out there on the origins of this minifigure or why he ended up arriving under Studios branding, but one of his two polybags also features a director, cameraman and car, so maybe the idea was that you could roleplay filming a Nesquik advert. That's what dreams were made of in the 2000s.

Anyway, the LEGO Group's partnership with Nestlé was a sort of on-again, off-again deal that had already been established by this point through a couple of promotional releases, but none were so blatantly corporate as Quicky…

CHRIS WHARFE

In 1989, the Police in LEGO Town had every vehicle they needed to keep the peace.

1.2.31
POLICE
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Urgent call for Special Task Force!
For all LEGOLAND® Town fans: the new super police station and 13 other breathtaking new ideas.
LEGO
LEGOLAND® Town
920379

9440 *Theme:* NINJAGO / *Year:* 2012 / *Average selling price new:* £24 / *Average selling price used:* £6 / *Recommended age:* 7-12 / *Minifigures:* 1 / *Pieces:* 86

Venomari Shrine

Early NINJAGO sets may not exactly be old by LEGO standards, but there is still room to update the classic models – especially those at a pocket money price. This updated build somehow manages to be even creepier than the original

NINJAGO went all in on snakes in its sophomore outing back in 2012. This update to 9440 Venomari Shrine recalls the original, which was one of the smallest offerings from the Rise of the Snakes.

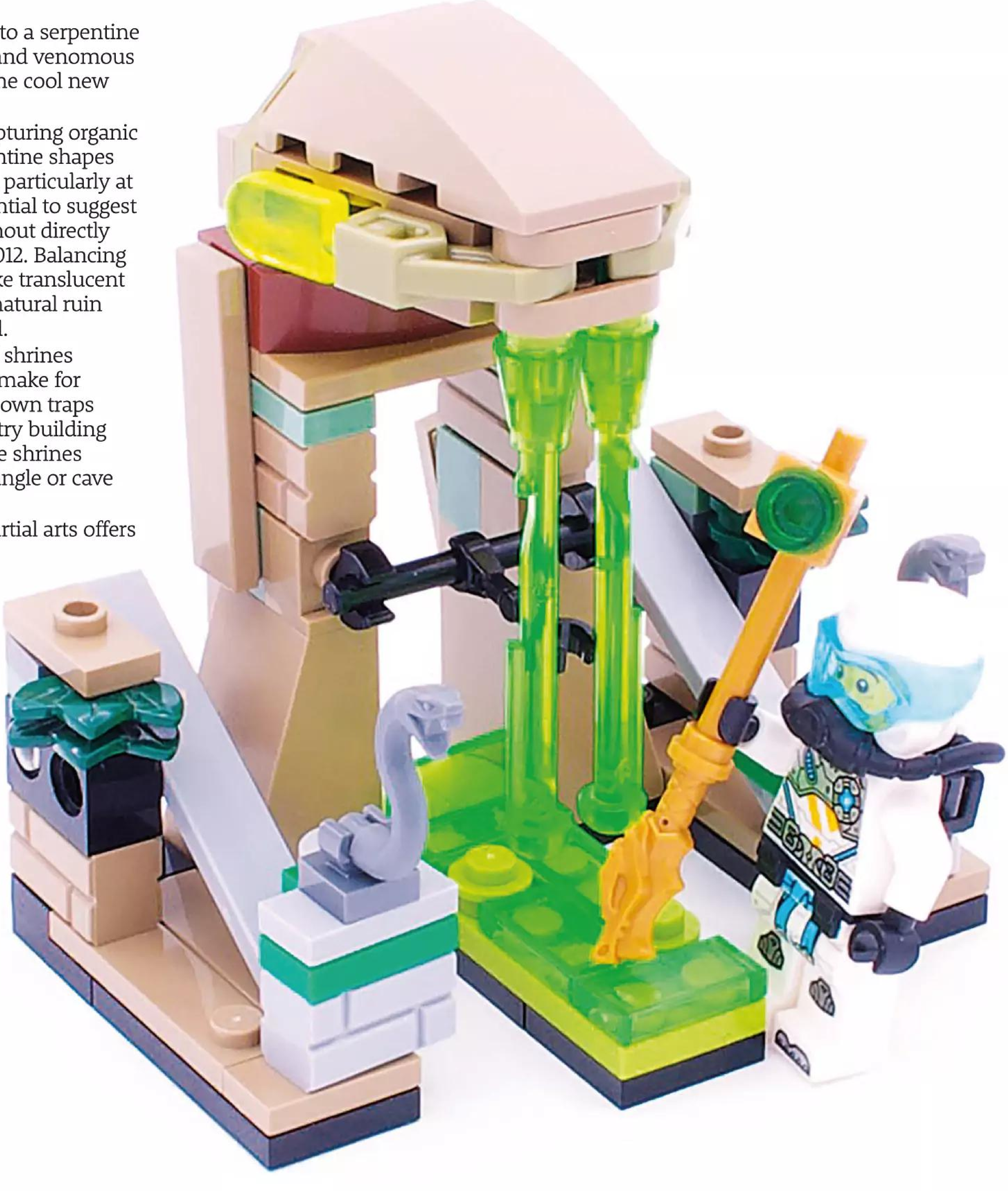
That original model introduced fans to a serpentine world of hidden treasure, booby traps and venomous enemies despite not including any of the cool new minifigures.

The trickiest aspect of the build is capturing organic curves in such a small footprint. Serpentine shapes are hard to replicate in LEGO elements, particularly at this scale, so careful part choice is essential to suggest coiled snakes and slithering forms without directly copying how designers did it back in 2012. Balancing earthy colours with bright highlights like translucent green helps to evoke the same mix of natural ruin and supernatural energy as the original.

Updated versions of other elemental shrines from the early NINJAGO stories would make for a fascinating build series, each with its own traps and treasures. Alternatively, you could try building larger complexes and combine multiple shrines into a temple setting, complete with jungle or cave surroundings.

The NINJAGO world of myth and martial arts offers endless opportunities for creative reinterpretation, which is probably why it will soon enter its 15th consecutive year.

DANIEL KONSTANSKI



Get the parts list: blocksmag.com/goto/shrine

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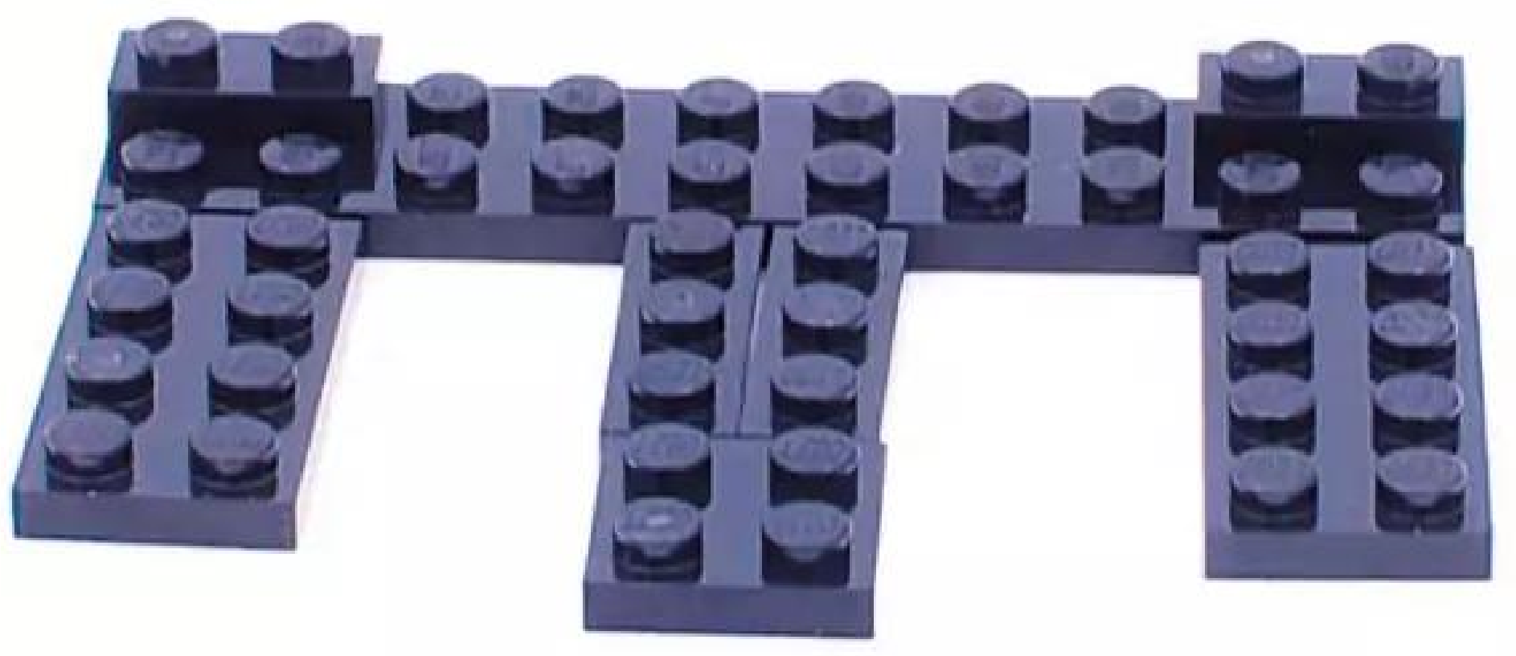

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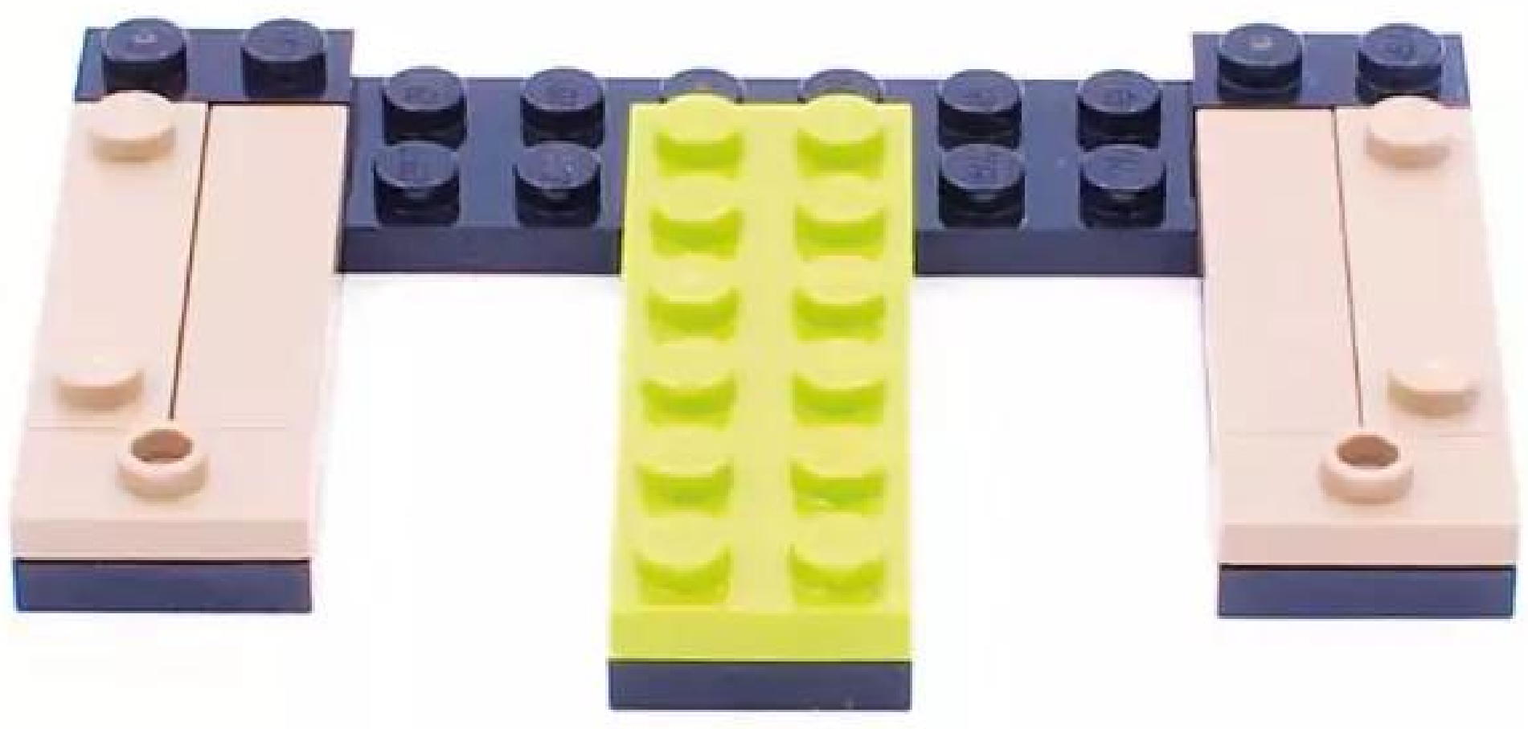

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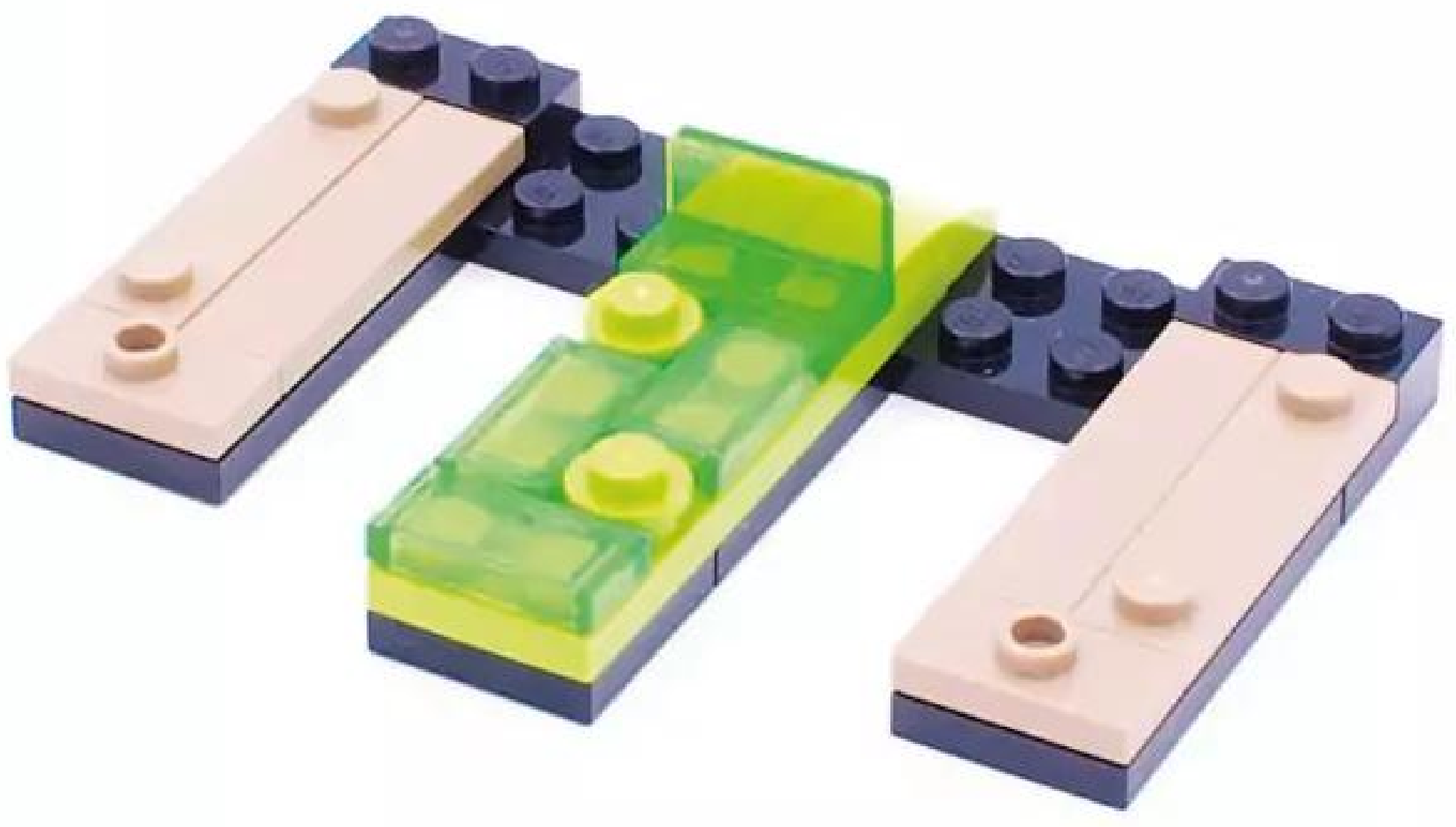

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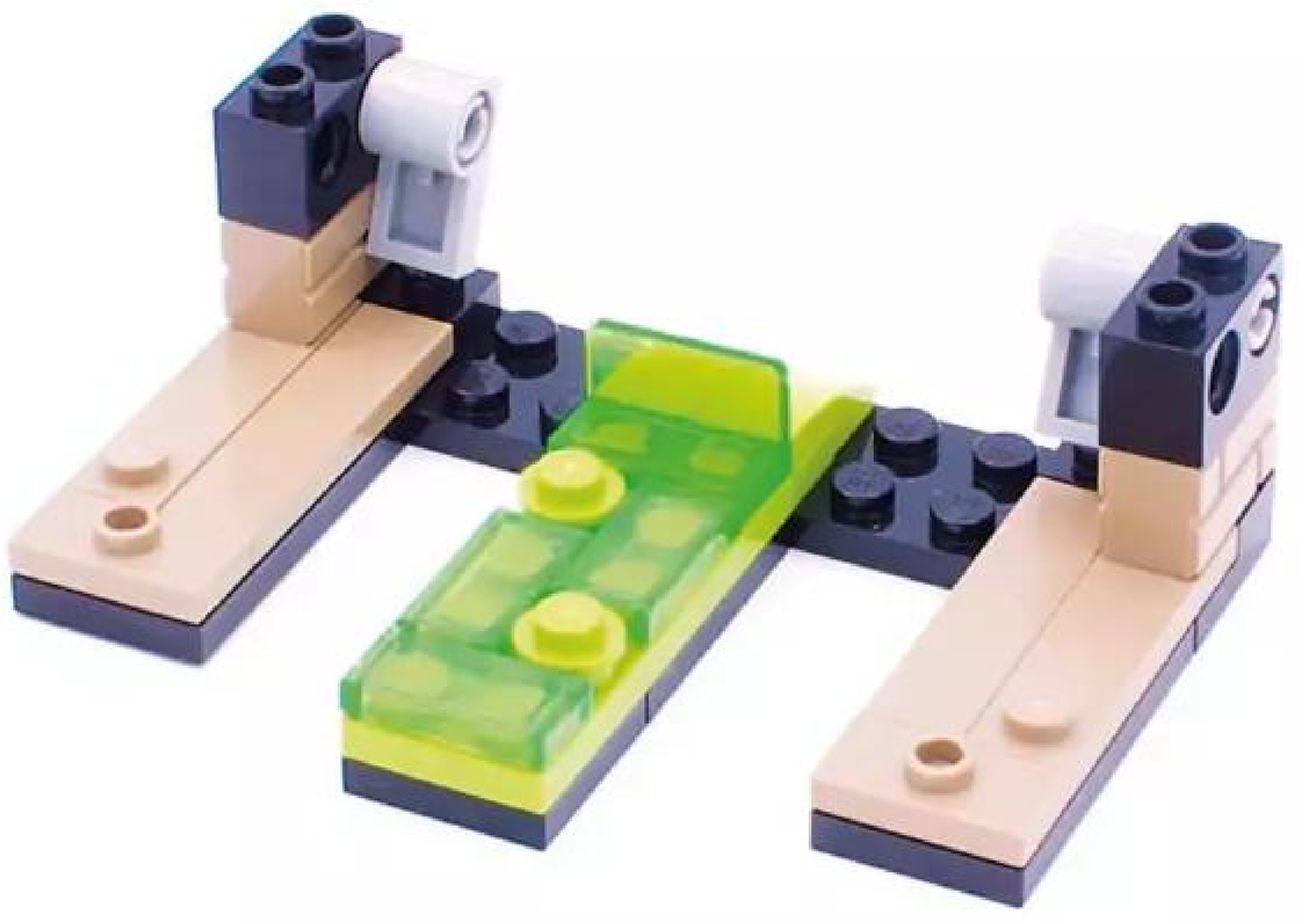

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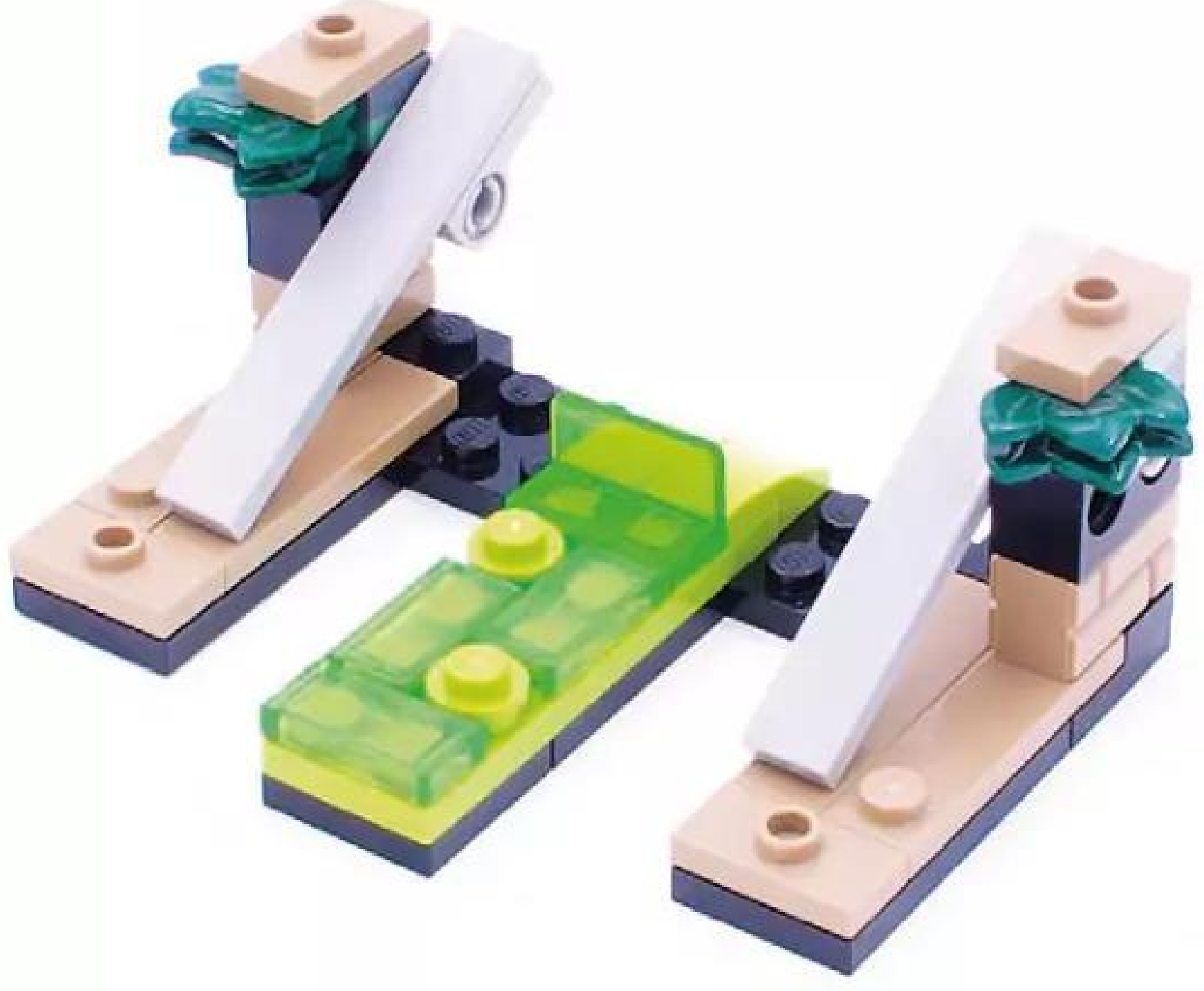

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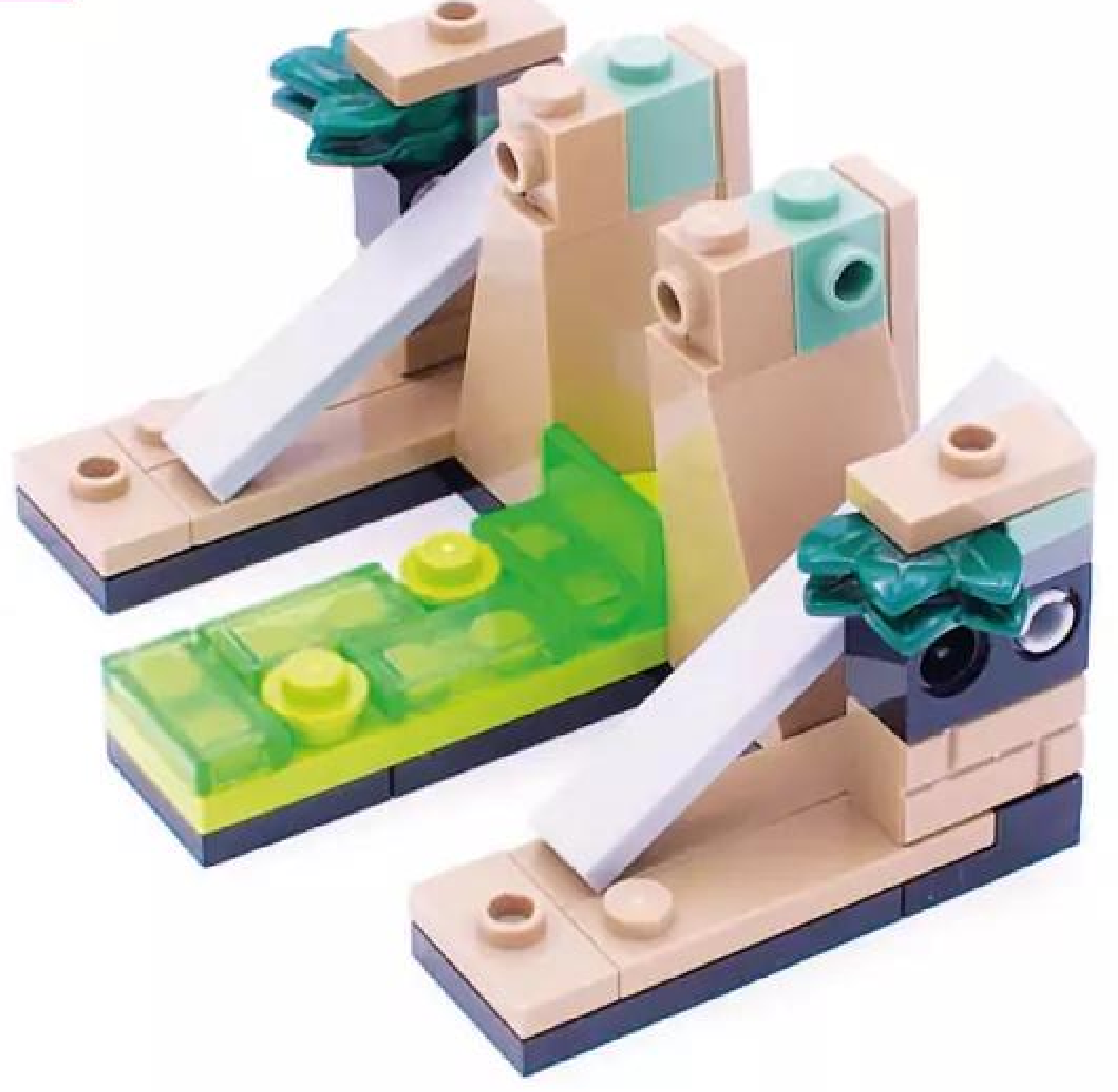

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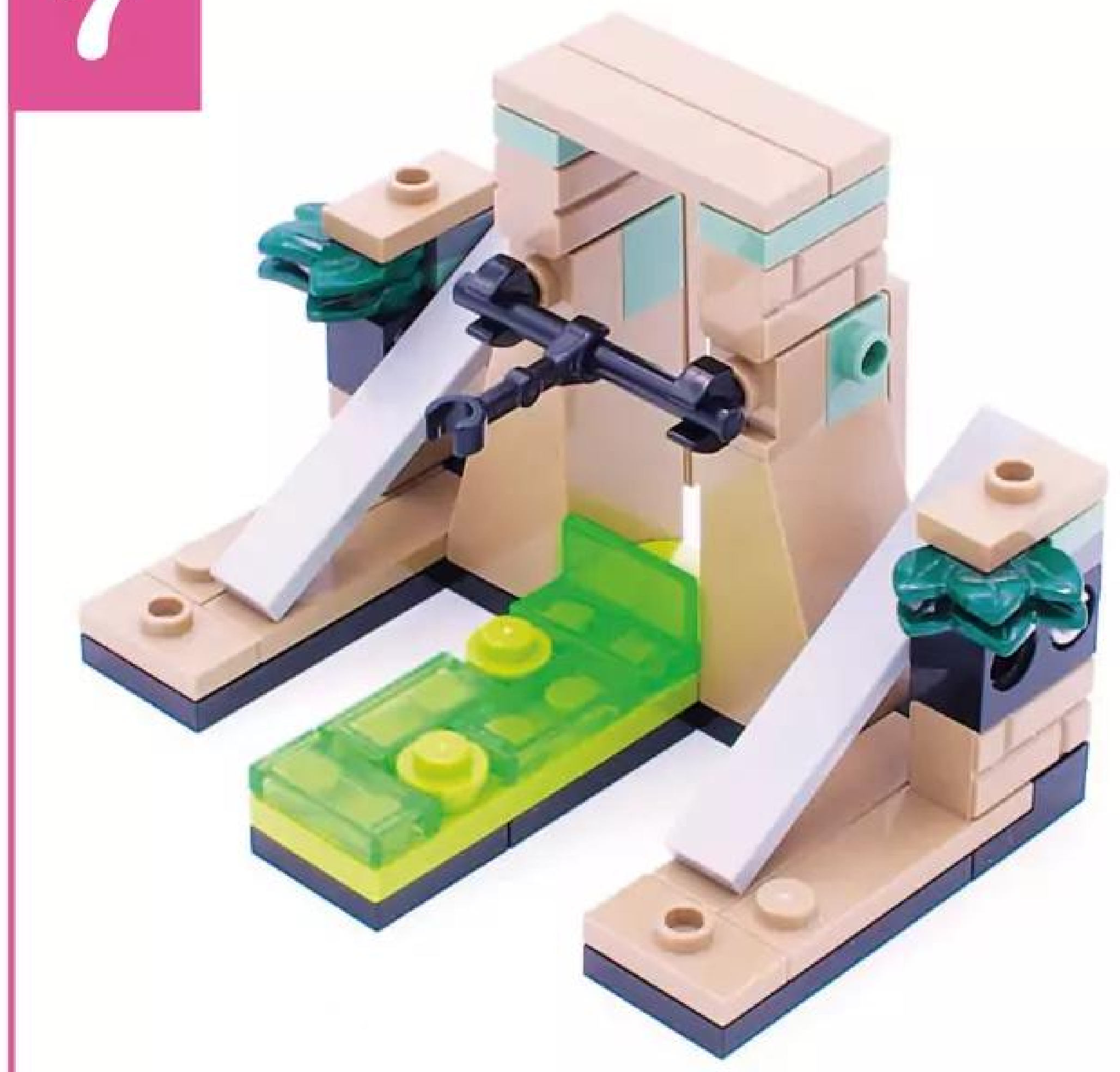

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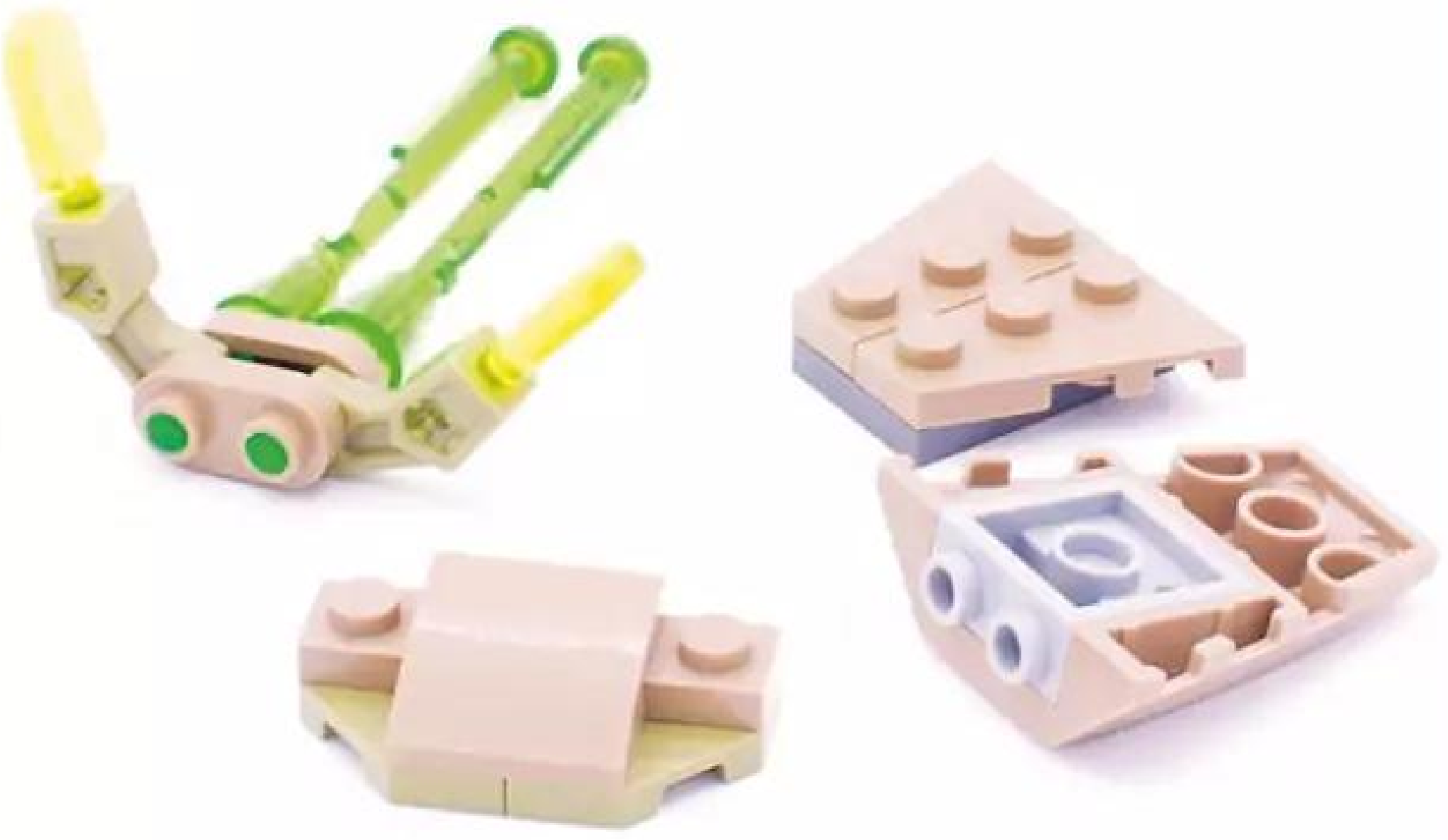

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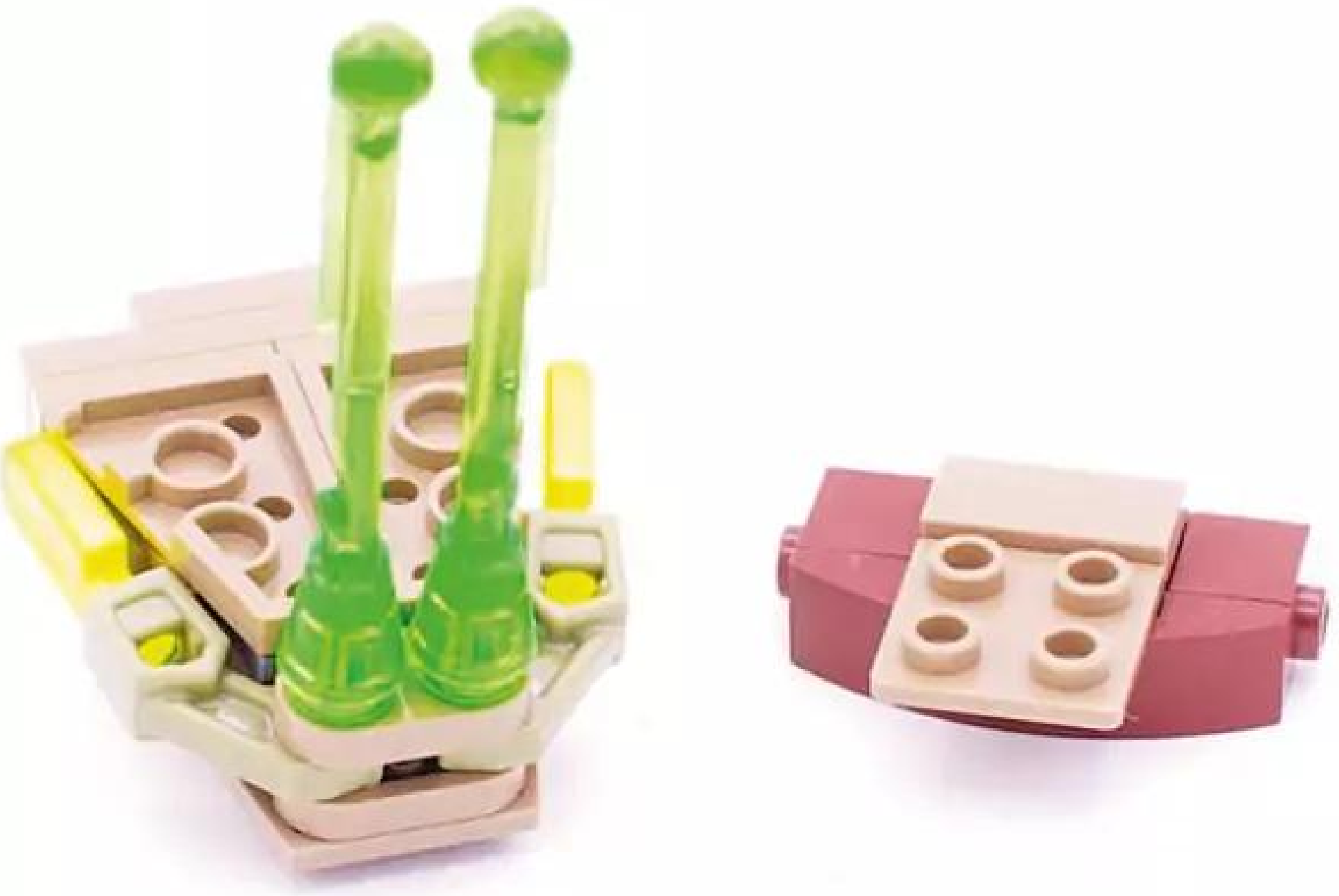

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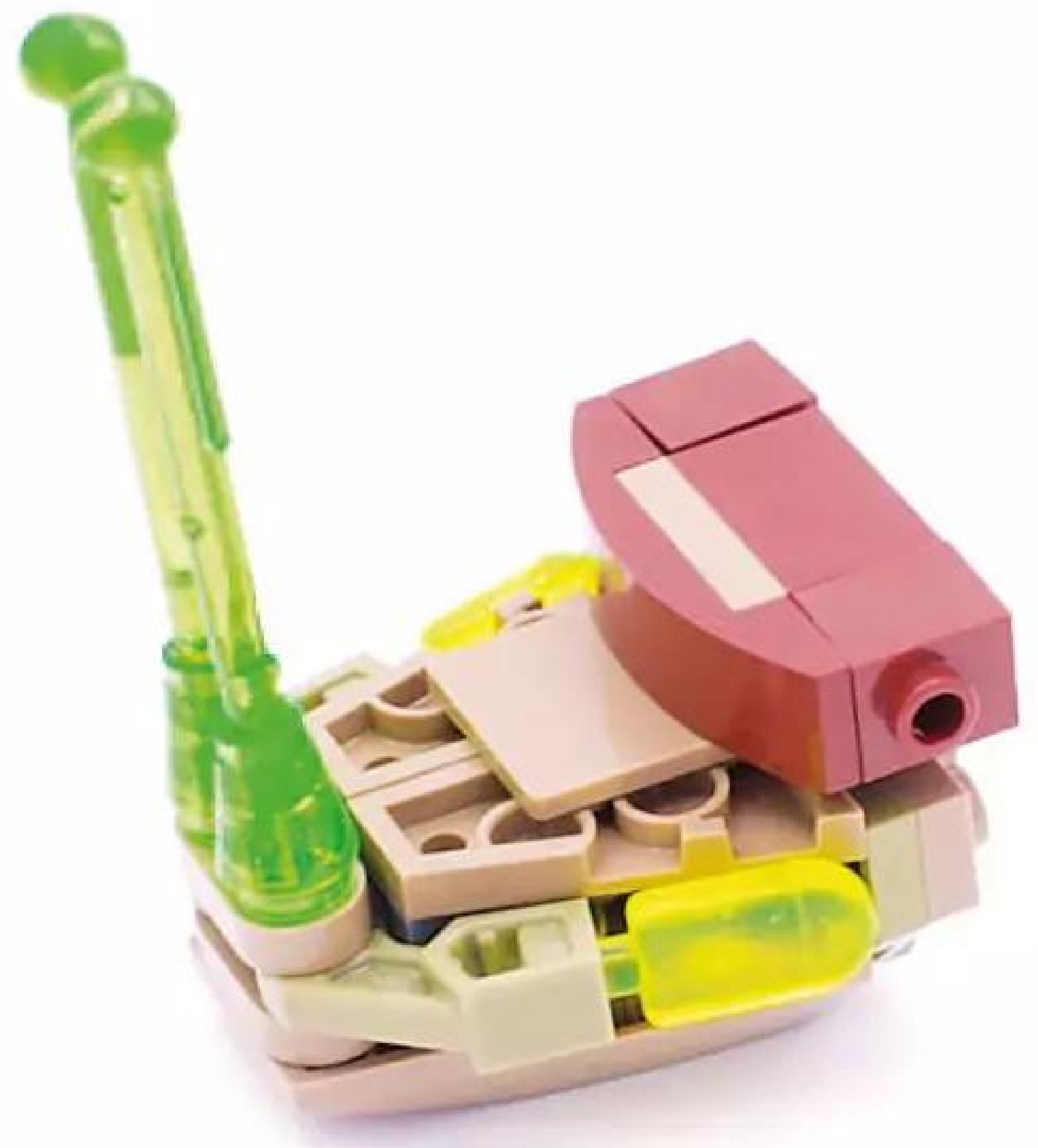

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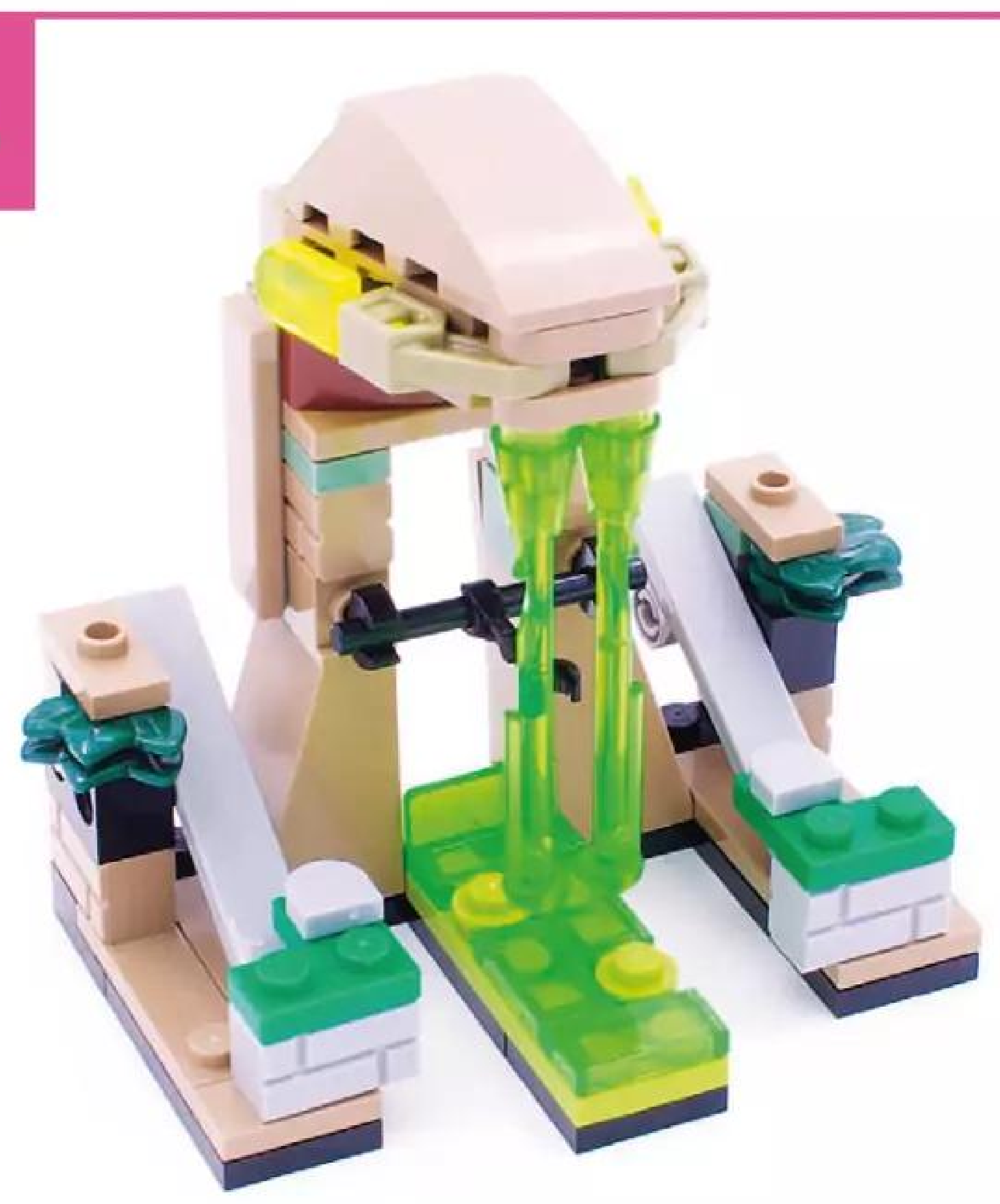

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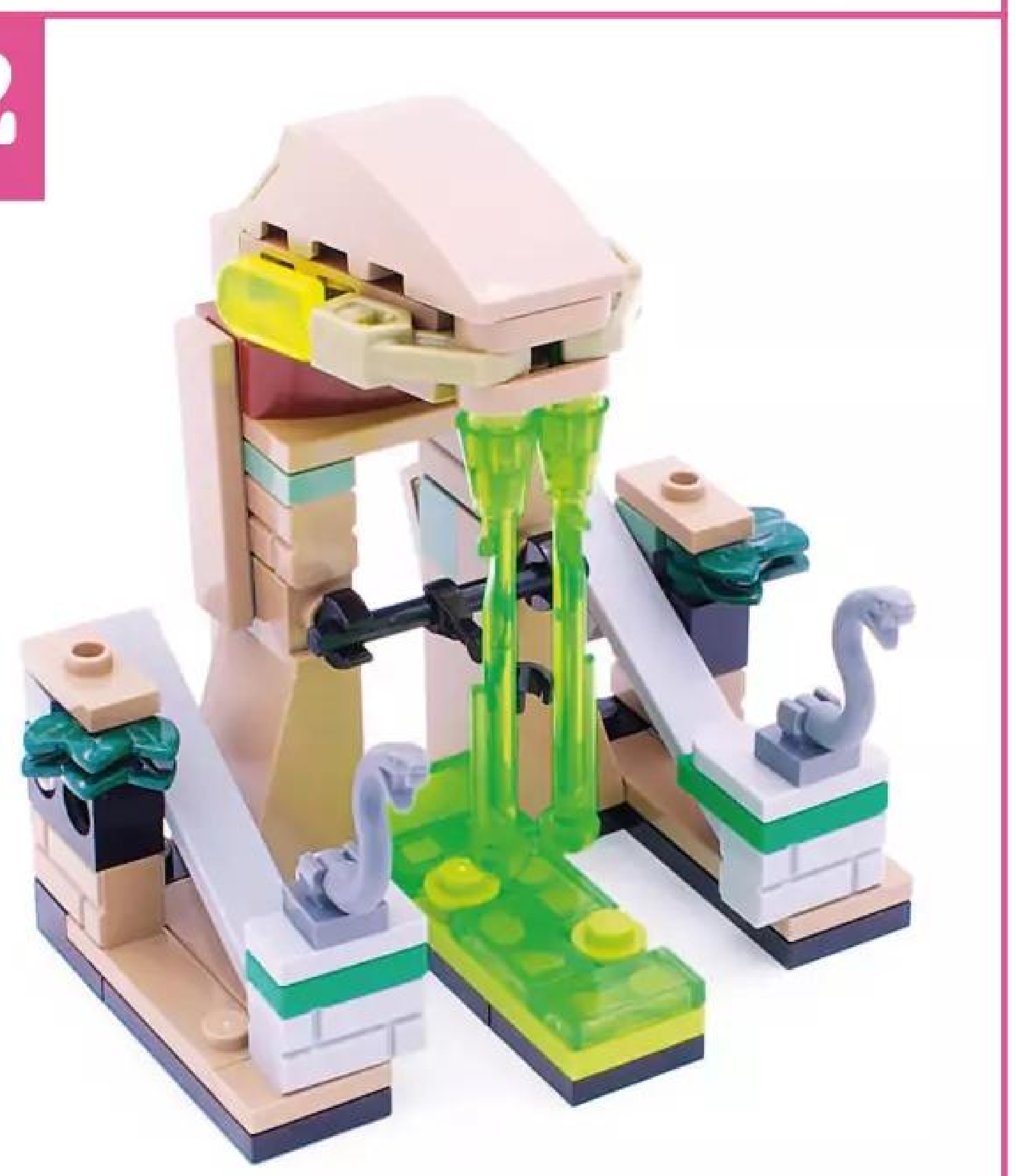

From the Vault

CONSTRACTION SYSTEM

Slizer or Throwbots were a line of bizarre looking figures constructed out of Technic elements and a new range of parts unlike anything seen before. The foundation of this new class of elements was a type of connection – the ball joint

Within the LEGO Group, the plan was for this family of parts to facilitate a new type of product that would combine construction with action figures. Just as 'LEGO' combines the words 'leg godt', this new system was dubbed 'constraction.'

The LEGO Group had action figures on the mind at the turn of the millennium. In one corner of the company Galidor was in development seeking to create a range of characters with interchangeable limbs. Slizer and then Robo Riders were experiments with a very different aesthetic. Constraction characters looked like figures without skin or robots without any plating or covering for their mechanical insides.

While they relied on Technic pins and axles as well as a variety of small connectors, the other parts were stylised with a distinct look and feel that had a lot of texture and accents. The ball joint was central to all of them, which served as the primary method for building. These early experiments were, however, just a proof of concept for the main event, which was ultimately BIONICLE.

In 2001, BIONICLE grew the constraction family of parts into its own system, distinct from DUPLO, System and Technic. By the end of the BIONICLE run, designers had created hundreds of ball and socket based elements for creating action figures, weapons and even vehicles. Constraction had become a fully-fledged system, the first new one since Technic in the 1980s.

Constraction did not have the staying power of its predecessors though. Eager to build on the success of BIONICLE, the LEGO Group released several new lines of toys built with constraction elements in its wake. In 2010 came both Hero Factory, which lasted until 2014, and Ben 10: Alien Force. Constraction figures for Legends of Chima and Super Heroes came and went in the mid 2010s.

Later, the LEGO Group tried to expand the system into other types of figures including more realistic looking Star Wars characters from 2015 to 2018.

None of those lines proved very popular and the constraction system faded away. Today, this expansive system of elements has gone extinct with no line of buildable figures in years. The only ball and socket joints that remain are standard System elements. Considering the LEGO Group destroys moulds after a certain period of inactivity, the chances are that the constraction system is gone for good.

DANIEL KONSTANSKI

BIONICLE was the most successful theme to use the constraction system.

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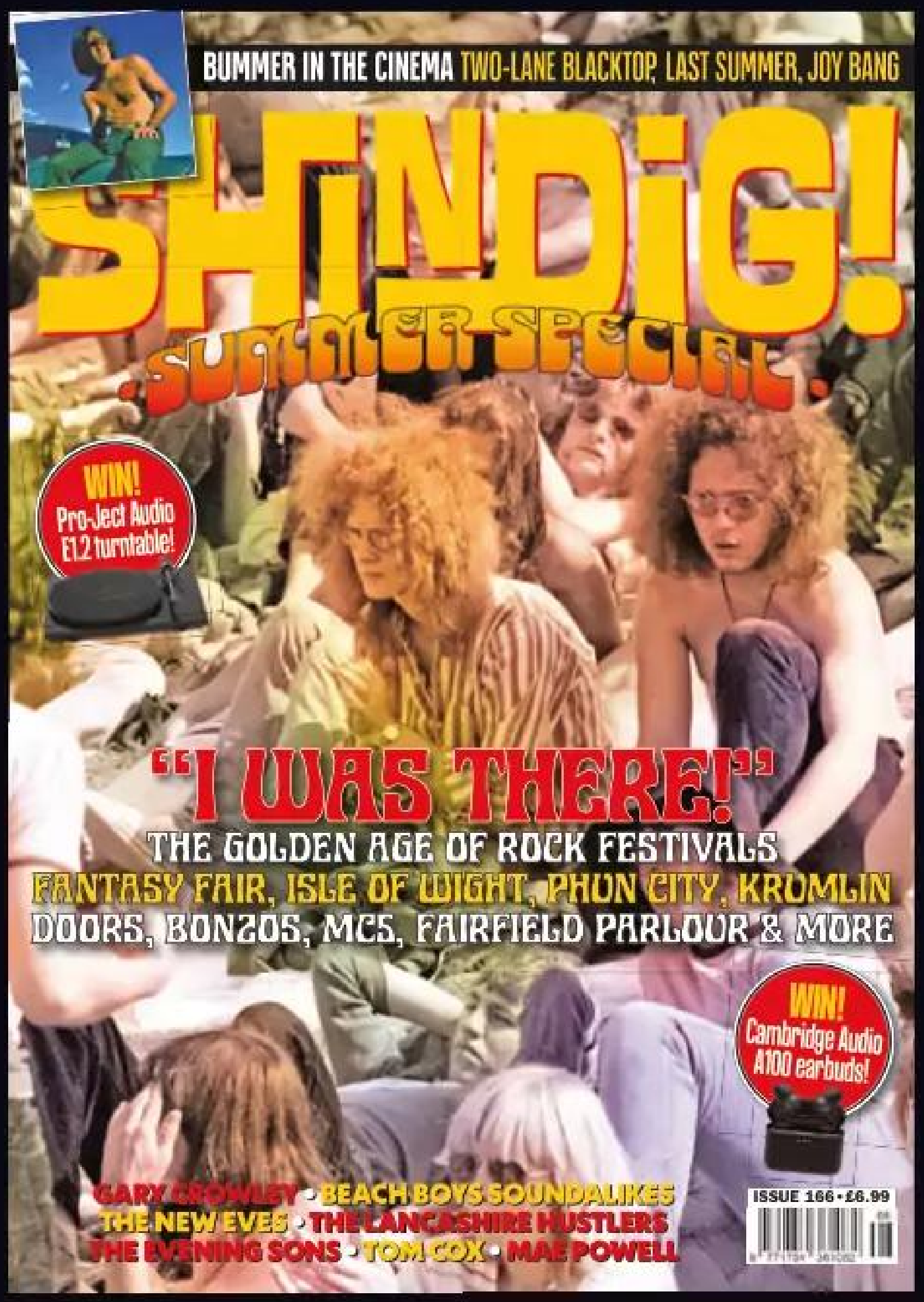
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